



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane,
Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL on Tuesday 21st July at 7.00 pm.

The Members of this Committee are:-

Cllr Chilton (Chairman)

Cllr Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Aaby, Burgess, Farrell, Feacey, Howard, Knowles, Krause, Link, Sims, Wedgbury.

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 Meeting of this Committee held on the 23 rd June 2015 | |

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

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| 4. | Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-18 | 1-33 |
| 5. | Quality Bus Partnership | 34-47 |
| 6. | Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 | 48-55 |
| 7. | Budget Scrutiny Task Group | 56-58 |

Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items

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| 8. | Future Reviews and Report Tracker. | 59-63 |
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KF
10th July 2015

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
- (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 **23rd June 2015**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Farrell, Feacey, Howard, Knowles, Krause, Link, Sims, Webb, Wedgbury.

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

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Burgess, Miss Martin.

Also Present:

Personnel Officer, Member Services and Scrutiny Manager, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

42 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 24th March 2015 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

43 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15

The Chairman advised that the Council's Constitution required the O&S Committee to make an annual report to Full Council. This was the report for the Municipal Year May 2014 – March 2015.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted, and presented to Full Council on 16th July 2015.

44 Sickness Absence 2014/15

The Personnel Officer introduced this item and drew Members' attention to the continuing downward trend in sickness absence, albeit marginal. He noted that ABC's sickness absence figures were healthy in comparison with other Kent local authorities and national statistics. However, he assured Members that there was no complacency, and that sickness absence figures were regularly monitored, and managers were offered continual support in terms of advice and training.

The Chairman noted that the Portfolio Holder had been unable to attend the meeting, but she had tabled a statement. Members considered the sickness absence figures showed that the Council had a strong handle on sickness absence, particularly in view of the fact that the figures were distorted by long term illness. In answer to a question, the Personnel Officer confirmed that reasons for absence were analysed, with a particular emphasis on stress related absence. He also advised that all long term sickness cases had now been concluded and staff had either departed from the organisation or had been managed back to work. Members confirmed that they would continue to welcome an annual sickness absence report to the Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted, and the Committee receive a further report in a year's time.

45 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Chairman questioned whether Members would be willing and able to attend daytime meetings of the Committee. Several Members said they were working during the daytime and would not be able to attend daytime meetings, so it was agreed that the Committee would continue to meet at 7pm. However, it was noted that the Council Chamber was considered too large for the Committee, and it was agreed that future meetings should take place in one of the other Committee Rooms. It was noted that the proposed meeting of 28th July would now take place on 21st July. Some Members requested that the Committee meeting of 27th October should be changed due to half-term and the Member Services and Scrutiny Manager agreed to look at alternative dates and advise Members of the Committee in due course.

The Chairman advised Members that volunteers would be required for the formation of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in July, and he asked any interested Members to contact the Member Services and Scrutiny Manager. Members suggested that the following items be added to the Report Tracker:

- Parish competencies – the Chairman responded that the Boundaries Commission would be covering this issue.
- Quality Bus Partnership – the Chairman said he would welcome a brief information report to the July Committee meeting when it could be decided whether to pursue the issue further.
- Emergency Room handling of the recent explosion in Little Knoll/Oak Tree Road – the Chairman considered this was a suitable one-off item for scrutiny and it was agreed to add this item to the Report Tracker.
- Implementing the Social Value Act 2012 and procurements falling under that Act – one Member considered that it would be useful to consider how the Act was being implemented and whether the Council were deriving all available benefits. The Chairman said he would like to receive a brief information report summarising the current situation, with a view to further investigations in due course.

The Chairman noted that Cabinet were also likely to ask the Committee to consider various items over the coming year.

Resolved:

- i) That the Committee meeting scheduled for 28th July 2015 be moved to 21st July 2015.**
- ii) That the Committee meeting scheduled for 27th October 2015 be brought forward to an earlier date.**
- iii) That the items 'Quality Bus Partnership', 'Emergency Planning' and 'Implementing the Social Value Act 2012' be added to the Future Reviews and Reports Tracker.**

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Rosie Reid:
Telephone: 01233 330565 Email: rosie.reid@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees

Agenda Item No: 4

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 21st July 2015

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

Report Author: Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager



Summary:	This report summarises the 2015 annual report of the Housing Framework 2013-18. It highlights work undertaken during 2014/15 to achieve the five priorities of the Framework and issues and opportunities presented over the last 12 months. The report recommends a review of the five priorities further to the publication of the Council's Corporate Plan.
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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.**

Recommend a review the five priorities following the publication of the Council's corporate plan.

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:

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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 during the year 2014-15.
2. To provide members with a copy of the Annual Report 2015 for agreement to publish on the ABC website
3. To consider if the five priorities are still relevant and whether a review would be timely further to the publication of the Council's Corporate Plan.

Issue to be Decided

4. To note the progress towards delivery of the five priorities of the Housing Framework 2013-18 during 2014-15.
5. To agree the publication of the Housing Framework Annual Report 2015.
6. To decide whether to recommend a review of the five priorities.

Background

7. 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.
8. 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

9. Last years Annual Report 2014 can be accessed at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/our-strategic-approach-to-housing>
10. In addition to the Annual Report, 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>
11. This report includes
 - A summary of the Action Plan (appendix 1) with an indicator to show progress.
 - The full draft Annual Report 2015 (appendix 2) that gives further detail on achieving each of the priorities, including cases studies to illustrate the role of housing plays within wider society.

Summary of the Annual Report

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

Through the Local Authority new build programme and new homes delivered by housing associations, 246 new affordable homes were completed in the borough during 2014/15, including 9 rural local needs properties. 13 empty homes were brought back into use, using HCA empty homes funding and 2 former council homes were purchased utilising one-for one (right to buy) money. The successful application to increase in the HRA debt cap enabled the purchase of 21 affordable homes from the developer of a mixed tenure site in Charing. The total number of new affordable housing delivered fell short of the identified need in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment of 368 homes per year. Shortages of materials and labour caused delays to new build completions and there was the loss of 31 Council homes through the right to buy.

A report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2014, detailed the use of s106 agreements and the associated viability issues, cited by developers, that may result in the reduction of affordable housing delivered from those set in the Core Strategy Policy for affordable housing.

The Property Company (A Better Choice for Property) was formally registered and became operational. The company had 4 properties let at end of March 2015.

As well as delivering more affordable housing, ensuring the maximum use of existing stock is also important. During 2014/15 void times were reduced to 19 days and the assisted moves scheme facilitated 35 older households to downsize, freeing up their family sized accommodation.

At the end of March the Council successfully bid for funding (together with 3 other local authorities) to provide grants to tenants to help them purchase a home on the open market. In Ashford 5 grants are available of £40,000.

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

Within the Council's own stock, a programme to insulate hard to heat homes and those which are 'off gas' to less expensive and renewable fuel options for heating and hot water continued. New build properties took a fabric first approach, together with renewable energy options, ensuring they met the Code for Sustainable Homes level 3.

In the private sector there are limited options to encourage improvements to owner occupiers homes. Two schemes linked to improving health outcomes as a result of energy efficiency improvements are available and signposted to.

Private sector landlords, signing up to the accreditation scheme can access funding for boiler replacement, but take up as been minimal.

The fuel poverty indicator remained static from the previous year at 7.6% of households in the borough being in fuel poverty.

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

The Social Lettings Agency saw a steady increase in the number of properties on full management option, particularly following the promotional event held in the town centre. There were 67 properties on full management option at end of March 2015. The private sector leasing scheme also provides an average of 64 properties per month. These homes are generally used for households who are or are at risk of homelessness. A general rise in the demand for private rented properties has seen a decrease in the number of rents below the LHA rates and an increase in the number of landlords unwilling to take tenants who are in receipt of benefits.

Disabled adaptations enable people to remain living independently at home. Both in the Council's homes and in the private sector there continued to be waiting times in the region of 12 months for an adaptation to be carried out. For tenants a prioritisation policy was introduced to better manage the process and provide transparency on waiting times.

Supported housing helps to maintain independence for vulnerable people. During 2014/15 the young person scheme started on site at The Limes, and move-on accommodation is being developed as part of the Kent PFI project. The Council's sheltered remodelling programme continues with a second scheme (Danemore) being consulted on. The Little Hill scheme is progressing under the Kent PFI and two extra care developments, led by Housing 21, were under construction in Ashford and Aldington.

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

The Council maintained its properties at 100% decent homes standard and gas safety certificate compliance. Rent collection was consistently high and the number of tenants in arrears was lower than the previous year.

The tenants' panel have greater involvement in scrutiny and the development of the Ashford Promise continued. Estate inspections have been reviewed and new ways of working introduced, the PSCOs now attend along with residents. A number of neighbourhood initiatives took place that also engaged with the wider community.

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

Prevention of homelessness continued to be the focus and a review of the housing options team identified that the team was working effectively and all services are geared towards prevention. Proactive work through the Welfare Reform Officers and at The Hub at Job Centre Plus is assisting people to respond to changes to benefit and wherever possible help them gain employment.

The refurbishment of Christchurch House was completed and this provides accommodation for 8 families, reducing the need to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation

The Homelessness Strategy commenced a review and a consultation event for stakeholders was held. The Review is informing the refresh of the Homelessness Strategy that will come before Members during 2015.

Review of the Five Priorities

17. The report to Overview and Scrutiny in 2014 noted a review of the Housing Framework be undertaken in 2015 further to the general election. It is suggested that this focuses on the five priorities and is commenced following the publication of the Council's Corporate Plan to ensure they align to the wider vision for the Borough.
18. Additionally with the expectation of new legislation emanating from central government a review of the five priorities will assist in planning for any impacts, either positive or negative that may result from new legislation or changes to existing legislation.

Handling

19. Following Members agreement the annual report will be formatted to meet ABC communications criteria and published on the ABC website.

20. A link to the published document will be circulated to all members and relevant stakeholders.
21. If agreed, a working group will be formed, to review the five priorities and update the action plan.

Conclusion

22. The Housing Service continues to deliver positive outcomes to its tenants, the wider community and the stakeholders it engages with.
23. The benefit of living in good quality housing that is affordable by the household contributes to wellbeing, health and prosperity for the individuals and the wider community.
24. The number of affordable homes available each year falls below demand, creating pressure on the housing register and homelessness' services. Rising demand for private rented properties, escalates rental prices making them unaffordable to many working households earning average or below average earnings and those receiving part or full benefits.
25. A review of the five priorities will ensure they are appropriate to best meet the housing needs of existing and future residents of the Borough and contribute to the overall economic prosperity of Ashford.

Portfolio Holder's Views

26. This is a good report and brings everyone up to date with current achievements. Future provision may need to be reviewed in light of the availability of resources.

Contact: Jennifer Shaw, Housing Strategy Manager

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Appendix 1 - Housing Framework 2013-2018 Action Plan

Timeframe: Short = within 2 years, Medium = 3 – 5 years, Long = more than 5 years

Status Achieved ✓
 On target ◇
 Missed ✕
 To be progressed *

Priority 1: IMPROVE THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING TO MEET LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS IN ASHFORD BOROUGH'S URBAN AND RURAL AREAS			
Action	Timeframe	Summary update	Status
a) Wherever possible maximise the number of section106 sites achieving 30 or 35 per cent affordable housing in urban and rural areas respectively	Ongoing	Housing services continues to liaise with planning colleagues to maximise the affordable housing delivery on s106 sites. Majority of sites granted planning permission in 14/15 achieved policy target, exceptions are Kent Wool Growers site and Conningbrook Lakes which were granted with no affordable housing requirement due to viability issues.	◇
b) Deliver a minimum of 59 new homes through the local authority new build programme	Medium (by 2018)	Programme for 11-15 = 39 homes completed and 20 due late summer 2015	✓
c) Create a local housing and regeneration company	Short (by 2015)	Company formed and operational from April 2014	✓
d) Housing company to develop private and affordable housing to an initial value of £10 million to meet local needs	Medium (by 2018)	Currently seven private rented properties in housing company portfolio	◇
e) Make best use of existing stock including ensuring appropriate accommodation	Ongoing	Void times reduced on previous year. Assisted moves continue to assist older tenants to downsize. Tenancy fraud investigations continue.	◇

used to meet housing needs, reduce under occupation and meet void targets, continue tenancy fraud investigations		Successful bid made with neighbouring authorities to offer cash incentive to tenants to purchase a home on the open market.	
f) Support Housing Association led developments to create mixed communities in urban and rural areas	Ongoing	Local Lettings plans and use of the Kent Housing Group Sustainable Communities protocol are used to aid creation of mixed communities.	◊
g) Develop innovative ways to improve delivery of local needs housing, including a cross subsidy approach and land purchase options	Short (by 2015)	Cross subsidy procedure developed. Affordable units purchased from developer of mixed tenure site at Charing	✓
h) Utilise receipts from the right to buy to develop more affordable homes	Medium (by 2018)	None delivered to date but use of 1 -2 -1 monies planned for new affordable homes during 2015. Two previously sold council homes were bought back using one for one money.	◊
i) Support self - build homes	Ongoing	No self build units progressed in 14/15. Investigating use of small council owned plots during 2015	◊
j) Identify and return to use long term empty properties	Ongoing	HCA empty homes funding enabled purchase of 13 empty homes. Targeted work being undertaken in relation to empty properties at Court Wurtin. Identification of empty homes and targeted work with long term empty private sector properties through Private Sector Housing team	◊

Priority 2: IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY OF HOMES AND ADDRESS FUEL POVERTY IN ALL TENURES			
Action	Timeframe	Summary update	Status
a) Develop and implement a private sector housing strategy	Short (by 2015)	Not progressed as now not required. Policy documents need to be updated and a PSH section to be included within the housing framework document	✗

b) Promote uptake of energy efficiency measures across all tenures	Ongoing	Upgrades to tenants boilers, insulation and reducing use of oil and LPG in off gas properties by replacement with renewable energy sources. New build homes delivered by the Council in 14/15 built to code for sustainable homes level 3. In private sector, landlord accreditation scheme has resulted in three boiler replacements.	◇
c) Work to reduce fuel poverty across all tenures	Ongoing	Fuel poverty indicator remained constant from previous year at 7.6% Signposting to schemes available – Winter Warmth Grant and Public Health Winter Warmth programme 17 referrals to the Warm Homes programme.	✗
d) Continue trial to insulate hard to heat homes in ABC stock and roll out main programme in 2015	Long	Programme now being rolled out with expected completion of insulation for between 15 and 20 hard to heat properties during 15/16.	◇
e) Promote uptake of renewable energy measures	Ongoing	In local authority and housing association homes renewable energy measures are installed where appropriate. No renewable energy measures were grant funded in the private sector	◇ ✗
f) Undertake private sector stock condition survey	Short (by 2015)	Not progressed due to high costs involved. Enquiries being undertaken into the use of BRE data to identify stock condition in the area.	✗
g) Maximise resources by linking with other agencies	Ongoing	Disabled Facilities Grant being reviewed with Occupational Therapy service and other Kent LA's to consider centralisation of aspects of service delivery Joint workshops on welfare reform delivered together with DWP to social landlords and private sector landlords	◇

Priority 3: INCREASE AVAILABILITY AND CHOICE OF ACCOMMODATION INCLUDING FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE			
Action	Timeframe	Summary update	Status
a) Increase availability of well managed private rented homes	Ongoing	Increase in homes under Social Lettings Agency. Private sector leasing scheme provides on average over 60 properties. Landlord liaison officers and private sector housing team identify and resolve issues in private rented sector and regular landlord working group and forum held.	◊
b) Continue to increase the number of homes within the Ashford Better Choice social lettings agency portfolio	Ongoing	Increased from 51 to 67 during 14/15 including 13 taken into management as a result of the expansion into the Shepway area.	✓
c) Identify and develop bespoke properties for disabled families through local authority new build programme	Medium (by 2018)	14/15 LA new build programme delivered 3 wheelchair standard properties including 1 bespoke design.	✓
d) Provide disabled adaptations for ABC tenants	Ongoing	262 disabled adaptations completed, increase in budget agreed and prioritization policy implemented.	◊
e) Work with partners to identify and increase range of supported housing for vulnerable people to meet local needs (including ex service personnel), seek alternative ways to generate revenue funding	Ongoing	Supported housing scheme for young people commenced construction. Move on accommodation commenced through Kent PFI Two extra care schemes under construction with Housing Association partners	◊
f) Manage the Disabled Facilities Grant budget to maximise assistance provided	Ongoing	53 adaptations provided	◊
g) Remodel and improve council-owned sheltered	Long	Programme of remodelling Farrow Court continues with phase 1 under construction. Plans for second scheme being developed	◊

housing accommodation		(Danemore)	
h) Provide increased provision of gypsy and traveller sites	Medium (by 2018)	Number of plots on Council owned site remain constant. Further provision most likely to come via planning policy.	✱
i) Develop Older Persons Framework	Medium (by 2018)	To be progressed and link to KCC Accommodation Strategy	✱
j) Increase the number of well planned and managed shared houses (HMOs)	Long	Small increase in number of applications for licensed HMOs. Work ongoing with the Private Sector Landlord Working Group.	◊

Priority 4: INCREASE RESIDENT SATISFACTION WITH HOMES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS AND INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT			
Action	Timeframe	Summary update	Status
a) Encourage housing providers to be actively involved in good housing management	Ongoing	Continued liaison with Housing Associations to deliver high quality housing and neighbourhood management	◊
b) Regenerate Brookfield Road and Bybrook areas	Medium (By 2018)	Bybrook scheme stalled due to difficulties financing community improvements from new build proposal.	✕
		Brookfield Road – being progressed through a number of individual projects, 5 new homes completed and other projects under consideration (e.g.The Poplars and Halstow Way)	◊
c) Review sheltered housing service	Short (By 2015)	Completed 13/14	✓
d) Joint working with agencies to deliver neighbourhood improvements	Ongoing	Range of community activities undertaken, including 3 ‘clean sweep’ days covering 6 areas.	✓
e) Address poor standards in private sector, including park homes and investigate options	Ongoing	Where necessary enforcement action taken to improve private rented properties. Park homes monitored and complaints addressed through	◊

for self funded improvements e.g. equity release		appropriate action. Charging Policy introduced. Equity release to be progressed	*
f) Maintain decent homes standard in council-owned stock	Ongoing	ABC stock 100% compliant	✓
g) Increase tenant involvement and responsibility through tenant panel and tenant scrutiny	Ongoing	Tenant panel taking a greater role in scrutiny	◇

Priority 5: PREVENT AND REDUCE HOMELESSNESS AND INCREASE ACCESS TO SETTLED ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS AND THOSE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS			
Action	Timeframe	Summary update	Status
a) Implement the homelessness strategy focus on: Preventing homelessness wherever possible Providing quality housing services and suitable accommodation for homeless people Homes with support, settled and sustainable homes	Short (by 2015)	Strong focus on prevention of homelessness as an invest to save measure adopted and implemented resulting in savings in B&B costs. Homelessness Strategy review being undertaken 14/15 with updated homelessness strategy to be adopted during 2015. Short stay temporary housing developed at Christchurch House, Christchurch Road, Ashford.	◇
b) Raise awareness of the implications of welfare reform to tenants	Short (by 2015)	Local media and Tenants newsletter used to update tenants and provide information on where to seek advice Joint workshops with DWP for Social Landlords.	✓
c) Identify tenants who will lose benefit and advise of choices to	Short (by 2015)	Area managers identify tenants who may face difficulties due to welfare reform and work closely with the Welfare Reform Officers.	✓

manage reduced income		Landlord Liaison Officers and Housing Options team have offered advice in the private sector	
d) Monitor external influences, identify pressures on meeting housing needs and respond to minimise any negative effects	Ongoing	Changes to legislation and policy affecting housing considered and opportunities for joint working investigated where a collaborative approach would be beneficial.	◊



Housing Framework 2013-2018

Annual Report 2015

Jennifer Shaw

Housing Strategy Manager

July 2015

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DRAFT

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>

Many of the activities undertaken by the Housing Service have positive social benefits to both the recipient and the wider community. 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 activities contribute to achieving more than one of the Housing Framework’s priorities. 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. This is recognised by the Ashford Health and Wellbeing Board where Homelessness is one of the key priorities. Similarly good quality appropriate housing can make a significant contribution to other priorities of the HWB such as dementia and falls prevention.

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>

New legislation and government policy will need to be considered and any impact on delivery of the housing framework's priorities monitored to ensure they are still relevant to meeting local housing need across the borough.

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 – During 2014/15 the new build programme completed 39 new homes for affordable rent. Three of these properties have been designed to wheelchair standards. These 39 homes have provided a home for 129 people including 77 children.

One home completed under the 2011-15 Local Authority new build programme was designed specifically for a large family with a severely disabled child. Emily suffers from both mental health and physical disabilities and previously lived with her family of 9 in a 4 bedroom property. Emily had been sharing a bedroom with a sibling which was becoming increasingly difficult for both Emily and her sister due to Emily's behavioural issues. There was a need for Emily to have her own room and most importantly the need for a level access shower room to enable her parents to be able to wash and bathe their daughter far more easily taking into consideration her behavioural and physical disability issues.

To accommodate this large family and meet the needs of Emily, as prescribed by KCC Disabled Children Services, it was decided that a bespoke 6 bedroom house would be the answer and the Council included this in its successful bid for funding to the Homes and Community Agency.

The house includes a wet room facility for Emily and a separate family bathroom upstairs. To help manage family life and Emily's behavioural problems, a separate family lounge was created with an open plan kitchen and dining room, creating the space the family need.

The house is effectively 2 properties combined into one. The services to the property and internal design have been configured to ensure the property is future proof and could be converted into two separate homes should this ever be required. The property was completed during March 2015 and the family have settled in well.

The eight new homes in Hawthorn, Appledore, have been built for people with a housing need and priority given to those with a proven local connection. Alongside the development work the council was able to improve the parking in the area, with the addition of new bays that will benefit the local community. Building rural affordable homes is important so that people can continue to live where they grew up and where their support networks are. Often prices in rural areas are beyond first time buyers and rents can be high – so rural affordable homes are vital. One resident was an integral part of the development, having agreed to the scheme using part of her garden for the build. Having previously lived in a three bedroom house on the site, Daphne has subsequently moved into one of the new bungalows and is thrilled with her home, saying: “It’s absolutely brilliant. It’s lovely!”

Empty Homes – 13 empty homes were purchased utilising the HCA empty homes funding, 9 were previously sold council properties and 4 private homes.

Utilising right to buy receipts – two previously sold council properties have been bought back using 1 for 1 money.

The Property Company – On the 17th April 2014 A Better Choice for Property Limited was formally registered with Companies House. The company has been set up to help the Council become a more commercially led organisation. During 2014/15 the company let 4 properties at below market rents, at or above the local housing allowance rate. More information on the property company is available on the web at www.abcproperty.org

Housing Revenue Account debt cap – By successfully applying to the government for an increase to the level of borrowing available to the Council under the Housing Revenue Account, the Council was able to negotiate the purchase of 21 homes for affordable rent and shared ownership at Poppyfields, in Charing. This is a mixed tenure development being brought forward by David Wilson Homes and will be the first time the Council has procured shared ownership properties. BPHA (the Help to Buy agent) has been engaged to assist with marketing and sales. A local lettings plan will be implemented, giving priority to applicants with a connection to Charing.

1.2 Registered Providers (Housing Associations):

Update on delivery – Over the last year 107 homes were built in the borough by Housing Associations. The conversion of the Crown Building (former tax office) by Moat contributed 25 affordable rented homes to this total.

There were 2 local needs housing schemes completed one of 4 homes in Pluckley (by English Rural Housing Association) and one of 5 homes in Kenardington (by West Kent Housing Association).

Westfields, Pluckley: Four homes for affordable rent; 2 x 1 bed flats and 2 x 2 bed flats. One resident, moved from a 3 bedroom house in the village, owned by Sanctuary HA, where she had lived for 30 years. She'd been living on her own in the house for many years and was delighted to now have an easy to maintain, economical to run, ground floor flat with wonderful views and lots of storage! This move has 'freed up' her previous home to let to a family. All occupiers of the four local needs flats know each other and have quickly settled in to their new homes. There is a small area of communal land which the residents are looking after and have themselves installed a couple of picnic tables and benches.

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.

A number of planning applications granted during 2014/15 on sites that meet the criteria to provide affordable housing are meeting the policy target. However the conversion of Trafalgar House from office to residential did not yield any affordable housing due to national policy overriding local requirements in such conversion. The decisions granted for the Kent Wool Growers site and Conningbrook Lakes development did not yield any affordable housing, with a loss of up to 137 affordable homes.

A report was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25th November 2014 regarding the use of s106 agreements and affordable housing delivery. Minute number 247.

1.4 Maximising use of stock:

In addition to build new affordable homes and bringing empty homes back into use, the efficient use of existing homes to meet housing needs is vital to address the shortage of affordable housing in the borough.

Void turn around – The average void turn around time continues to decrease, to 19 calendar days in 2014/15 compared to 21 days in 2013/14. During 2014 weekly meetings with staff involved in voids and the contractor were instigated, this has led to a greater understanding of roles and responsibilities and the ability to plan the work required to forthcoming voids in addition to reviewing work undertaken. Performance monitoring criteria of turn around time, rent loss and resident satisfaction are measured. Clarification of properties excluded from the void monitoring has enabled a better void management. Such properties would be those

that require major works, such as a bathroom replacement or have a particular issue that would be above normal void works e.g. treating an infestation.

Reducing under occupation – The Council continues to offer its assisted moves scheme to older tenants who occupy homes larger than their needs. In 2014/15 35 assisted moves were facilitated, freeing up family homes for re-letting.

Mutual exchanges – 98 people undertook a mutual exchange, with 13 of those being from outside the borough. The mutual exchange scheme enables tenants to move to more suitable property and /or area.

Tenancy fraud investigations – Housing Services and Revenues and Benefits staff continue to investigate cases of tenancy fraud as required to make sure homes are lived in by the tenant and not sublet.

Social mobility fund – The Council successfully bid, in March 2015, in partnership with 3 other local authorities for funding to assist tenants, who would qualify for the right to buy, to purchase an open market home by offering them a cash incentive. The government grant offers £20,000 this will be match funded from the Council. In Ashford a total of 5 grants of £40,000 each are available. The scheme is operational from April 2015 for one year.

1.5 Strategy and Policy:

The Housing Service continues to work closely with the planning policy team to assist with the development of affordable housing policy for the evolving local plan.

The Housing Service is represented at both Kent Housing Group and the Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board (Housing) where joint approaches are developed, such as Think Housing First which sets out a Kent wide ambition to reduce health inequalities through the benefits brought to health and wellbeing by good quality housing and housing management.

1.6 Issues and Opportunities

Shortages of materials and labour resulted in delays to completion dates for new build projects and risk of losing grant funding. Delays caused by utility companies have been recognised by the HCA and waivers agreed to allow for an extension for grant funding to be drawn down where lack of a utility connection prevented completion by end of March 2015.

There were 31 council properties sold where tenants exercised the Right to Buy, this represents a loss of affordable housing available to applicants on the register and a council asset. Although a proportion of the capital receipt is available to replace the homes sold this has so far only delivered 2 replacement homes through the buy back of previously sold council properties.

The number of affordable homes built in 2014/15 increased on the previous year but is still lower than the number required to meet local housing needs as identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment of 368 homes per year.

The social mobility fund has potential to free up 5 Council properties for letting if their current tenants are able to purchase a home on the open market.

The extra care housing schemes will create movement in the housing stock, by enabling older people to move from their current accommodation and potentially free up family housing.

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 percentage of fuel poor households in Ashford borough has remained static at 7.6% according to the data sets issued by Department of Energy & Climate Change for 2013 (updated 2015) and 2012 (updated 2014), but with a slight increase in the actual number of households, estimated at 3730 households and 3613 household for those respective years.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-sub-regional-statistics>

Energy efficiency for tenants – As part of the on-going Affordable Warmth Programme the council continues to assist tenants to reduce their energy bills by installing 'A' rated gas boilers with system upgrades to meet Part L requirements. The approach to off-gas properties (to phase out the use of expensive and volatile fuel types such as oil and LPG heating systems) is to fit high efficiency storage heaters and renewable energy sources where appropriate.

The on-going insulation programme continues to address hard to insulate properties. In addition to regular cavity and loft insulation improvements further steps have been taken to address those properties that have no wall insulation such as 'airey' houses and solid wall types.

Energy Efficiency in ABC new build – The homes completed in 2014/15 phase of the programme meet the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 standard by using a fabric first approach. Complementary sources of renewable energy were then added together with elements to enhance the green credentials of the build. The walls are of a thin joint masonry system with fully filled cavity walls, the floors and roofs are highly insulated making the properties extremely airtight and thermally efficient which reduces heat use and heat loss. The objective was to build high quality houses that will last for decades, able to withstand the rigours of a number of different tenant families over time. This approach ensures the homes are easy and comfortable to live in, whilst delivering excellent U-values and airtightness in the process. To

supplement the inherent thermal and energy efficiency of the build, solar PV panels were used on the roof of some dwellings and in rural areas, where there was no gas, air source heat pumps together with under floor heating and pressurised water system. Where gas was available, highly efficient boilers are installed. This was coupled with rainwater collecting and permeable external hard surfacing to create more sustainable drainage systems.

Energy efficiency in the private sector – the landlord accreditation scheme provides funding for landlords, who are accredited, of up to £2,000 towards boiler replacements. This enabled three boiler replacements. The accreditation scheme is to be reviewed as there has been low interest from landlords wanting to become part of the scheme.

The Warm Homes scheme continues to provide subsidised insulation and heating improvements to eligible residents and there were 17 referrals to this scheme.

There is a small amount of money through the Winter Warmth Grant to fund heating improvements for elderly people with health issues. Referrals come from care professionals and doctors through the Home Improvement Agency. The Councils involvement is to pay for the works. Total number of referrals were 5 of which one applicant has recently had heating improvements carried out and one other has been given approval to start works.

In addition residents can be signposted to the KCC Public Health Winter Warmth programme which aims to reduce the risk to the escalation of health conditions due to cold weather and cold homes in particular. This programme provides emergency warmth solutions, but also some financial support, in the form of a repayable grant for heating or insulation for those not eligible for the Government Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation.

2.2 Issues and Opportunities:

The local authority housing stock is maintained to a high standard and cyclical maintenance programme enables the upgrading of fabric and systems to ensure tenants homes are easier and cheaper to heat.

In the private sector, improvements are ad hoc, dependent on residents coming forward for advice or referrals into a scheme to help those meeting certain criteria. There are few incentives to encourage owner occupiers, particularly those with limited resources, to improve their homes. Comprehensive information on the standard of the housing stock would be required to formulate a targeted approach to improving the energy efficiency and disrepair of homes, together with updated policies to ensure a consistent approach.

The review of the landlord accreditation scheme provides an opportunity to consider how this initiative could encourage greater take up of improvement measures, which would benefit both landlord and tenants.

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

3.1 Utilising the private rented sector:

Social lettings agency – There was a steady increase in the number of properties on the full management option, from 51 in April 2014 to 67 in March 2015. 10 properties were taken on during February 2015 likely to be the outcome of the promotional event in the town centre, to recruit more landlords into the scheme, where an empty shop was used as a lettings agency for one week. This resulted in over 30 landlords calling in to gain more information and many landlords expressing interest in the scheme.

For more information <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/abclettings>

Private sector leasing – This scheme continued to provide accommodation for an average of 64 households each month during 2014/15.

3.2 Increasing the availability of well managed private rented homes:

There are a number of initiatives to positively engage with private sector landlords on an informal basis; the landlord working group is held quarterly and there have been landlord forums, in July 2014 and March 2015. The event in March focused on Universal Credit and included speakers from Job Centre plus, the Valuation Office Agency, Kent Savers and the National Landlords Association.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) – during the last year a slight increase was noted in the number of licence applications for HMOs. In terms of enforcement action there was 1 Improvement Notice, and 1 Sec 80 under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 resulting in the landlords rectifying problems with heating and hot water, that tenants had previously been without. Two Hazard Awareness Notices, for issues with heating, have brought to the landlord's attention that there were issues that need to be addressed. These will be followed up and if the landlord's have failed to act further action will be considered.

3.3 Disabled adaptations:

Adaptions in Council homes – the Council continues to provide adaptions to tenants' homes to increase independence for those with a disability or long term limiting condition. In the last year 262 adaptions were installed at a cost of £364,816. To better manage the adaptations process and provide greater transparency to residents regarding waiting times a prioritisation policy was introduced in July 2014. In summary, all tenants requiring major works (estimated to cost over £1,000) complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire gives points to tenants based on their level of need and the difficulty they have with their present home. Additional points are awarded based on length of time on the waiting list (1 point per month waiting) so that someone with low points from the questionnaire will accumulate points over

time, as those with the highest points are given priority. The budget has increased each year since 2012, to reduce waiting times and ensure tenants do not wait longer than a year for major works.

To provide best value a policy has been introduced to refuse disabled adaptations in certain circumstances, most specifically where there is significant under-occupation of a council home. Instead, such tenants will be supported to move to more appropriate accommodation.

Disabled facilities grants – in the private sector a total of 53 adaptations were completed, with an average waiting time of 12 months. There has been an increase in the number of flush floor showers required.

3.4 Supported Housing:

Young people – the eight unit scheme reported in last years report is under construction, but completion has been delayed due to archaeological remains being discovered on site. Improvements to the neighbouring play area have been completed further to a consultation event with residents.

Move on accommodation – The 11 units of accommodation under the Kent PFI, Excellent Homes for All are progressing.

Sheltered and extra care accommodation – The redevelopment of the Farrow Court scheme continues and an update is included the members Housing Quarterly Performance Report. The second Council sheltered scheme to be redeveloped to bring up to modern, standards is Danemore in Tenterden. Two resident consultations have been held both with tenants and neighbours. The scheme design is currently being reviewed in light of comments received at these events; however the principle of the redevelopment was broadly welcomed. The Council's Little Hill sheltered scheme, at St Michaels, has been demolished and the site is being redeveloped through the Kent PFI. Housing 21 are building two extra care schemes in the borough, Chamberlain Manor was due for completion by March 2015 but delayed due to a wait for utility connections. The 67 flats of affordable rent and shared ownership will now be ready in July 2015. The rural scheme in Aldington started on site in January 2015 and will offer 33 flats of affordable rent and shared ownership with priority to older local people. A public consultation event was held in October 2015 to gain local opinions on the design and layout of the extra care scheme proposed for Charing. Subsequent to the planning application being submitted a number of local concerns were raised. The application has been deferred to allow time to consider these and review the design accordingly.

3.5 Issues and Opportunities:

Accessing the private rented sector for people on a low income can be difficult as there has been a reduction on the number of properties available to rent below the

Local Housing Allowance rates. Increasingly advertisements for private rented homes stipulate that they will not accept people in receipt of benefit.

The extra care schemes will facilitate downsizing and help maintain independent living for older people. In turn this frees up family sized homes. Current extra care schemes mainly cater for older people from social housing or homes with lower values. There is a need to consider how to meet the needs of more affluent older people with higher levels of equity in their property.

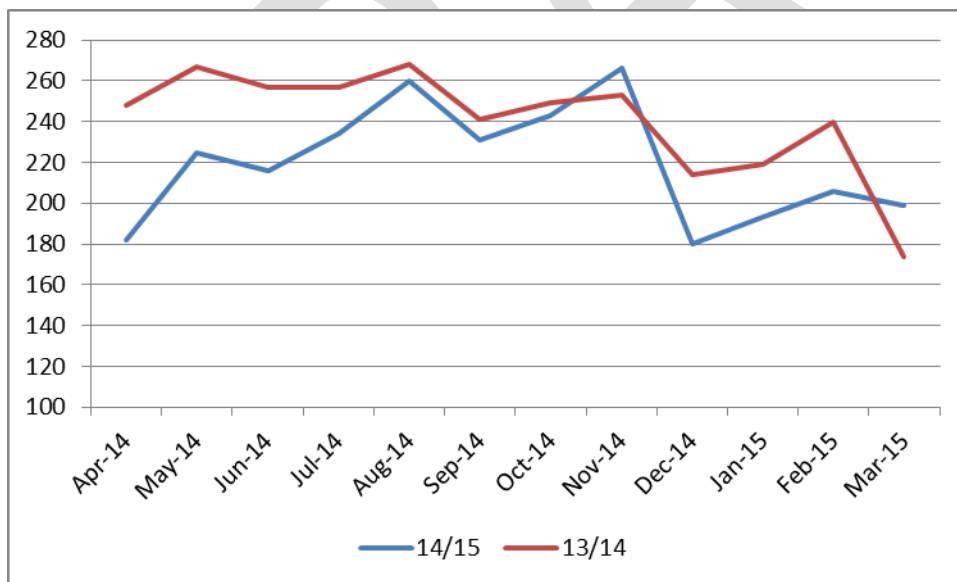
4. Priority 4: Increase resident satisfaction with homes and neighbourhoods and increase opportunities for resident involvement

4.1 Good housing management:

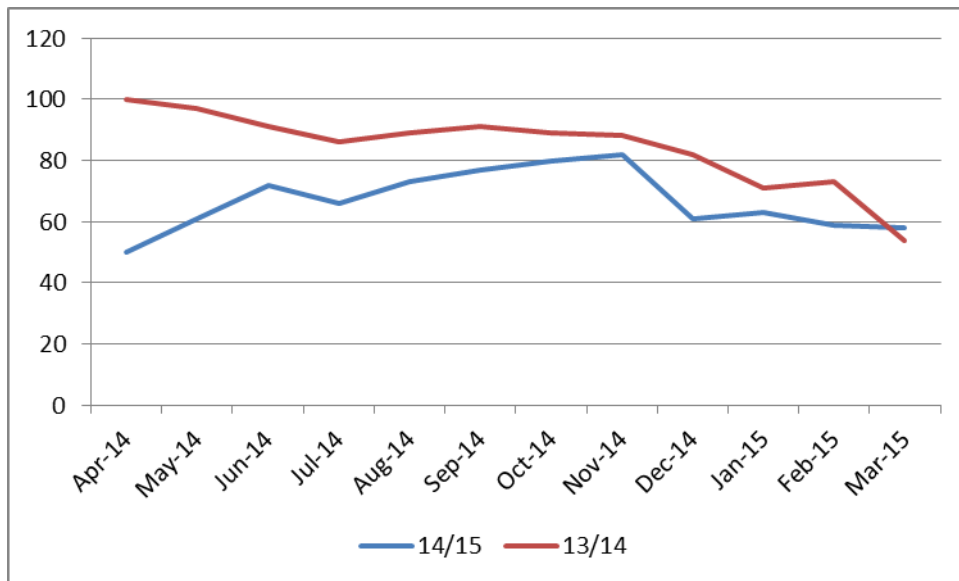
The Council facilitates the Housing Association Management Forum to encourage sharing of good practice and to engage the Housing Associations with homes in the borough in local initiatives.

Rent collection for ABC owned and managed homes stood at 99.55% in March 2015. The graphs below show the number of tenants more than 7 weeks in arrears and more than 13 weeks in arrears was consistently lower in 2014/15 than 2013/14

More than 7 weeks arrears



More than 13 weeks arrears



ABC Tenant Panel – the panel is taking a more active role in how their homes are managed, with an emphasis on scrutiny. The panel’s first project was to consider the policy regarding the improvements tenants can make to their own homes. Secondly they have inputted to the new tenants handbook. Further to undertaking a training course, tenants make up the complaints panel, as the ‘designated person’ in the complaints procedure.

Two long serving Ashford tenants panel members each received highly commended certificates from the Kent Housing Group for the tireless work they do for resident engagement in the borough.

A new tenant panel member said “prior to joining the panel I was not aware that such a provision existed in which council tenants and staff can talk and negotiate many different matters relating to social housing. The panel enables a real ‘voice’ to council tenants and is very helpful in both solving potential problems and avoiding them.

Tenant engagement – A new monthly e-newsletter was launched in February 2015, ‘Tell-us’ asks for tenants views on specific areas of work and encourages greater engagement. The garden competition was again run during 2014 and highlighted some very well cared for and imaginative gardens.

A home contents insurance scheme has been negotiated and introduced for tenants as it was found that many tenants were not covered and did not appreciate they had to take this insurance out themselves. This initiative went live on the 1st February 2015.

Sheltered housing – Several sheltered scheme managers have completed Dementia Champions training and are rolling out a programme of dementia friends training to

sheltered scheme residents and local groups. The sheltered forum is made up of representatives from the borough's sheltered schemes and is working with scheme managers to rejuvenate itself. The group has met to start the process and has already discussed some really positive ideas to increase membership, work with sheltered groups for other housing organisations, and seek funding for projects.

Chilmington gypsy site – The Council owned site of 16 pitches is managed by staff from Housing Services. In 2014 smart meters were installed to monitor electricity use and assist residents to understand their electricity consumption.

Anti social behaviour - The successful programme of 'clean sweeps' continued in 2014/15. This initiative is a multi agency approach to the problem of dealing with various aspects and types of anti social behaviour with both the voluntary and public sector involved. In the nominated area partners will, identify, process and where necessary remove vehicles which appear to be abandoned, remove rubbish and graffiti, deal with any offences revealed and take any other enforcement action that is applicable with regard to the premises visited either against the owners or tenants. This demonstrates that the partners represented can work together, to improve the environment, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, improve public safety, provide reassurance for the people of the specific area and improve their confidence in the ability of the partners represented to deal with problems that cause them concern. Also to ensure that people live in good quality housing, and to take action if it is found that premises are sub standard. There maybe the opportunity to gather evidence and intelligence during the event, to support prosecutions and to facilitate further action by the appropriate enforcement agency. There were 'clean sweeps' in Wye and Hothfield, Singleton and Brookfield and Newtown and South Willesborough.

Ashford Promise - Development of this initiative to use existing services to encourage tenants to take greater personal responsibility and engender an improved relationship with The Council, as their landlord, continued through out 2014/15. Testing of systems to support The Promise will be concluded with an anticipated launch in late summer/early autumn 2015.

4.2 Neighbourhood Improvements:

Estate inspections - To improve estate inspections a new computer system has been installed which will allow all aspects of an estate inspection to be carried out electronically on a tablet. This will save time which can be used to do better quality inspections. The area managers and residents will be joined by PCSOs to promote community working and to help tackle anti-social behaviour. It became apparent that some areas need more inspections than others. As a result a new three tier system has been introduced. This ranks all areas resulting in either, one, two or three inspections per year.

Project Purple launched on 30 September 2014 with over 60 year 5 pupils from Ashford Oaks Primary School in South Ashford embarking on this exciting project. Each child gives 10 hours of their time to help in their community. The first project is turning an area of rather neglected land by Crownfield Road, South Ashford into a useful space to benefit the whole area. The project is supported by parents, the police, Hang 10 and The Council.

Responsible dog ownership was promoted through a joint initiative with the Dogs Trust. In total over 50 dogs were 'chipped' in Rolvenden, Biddenden, South Ashford and Newtown.

Residents in the sheltered schemes continued to plan and hold a range of activities throughout the year. At a strawberry fayre at Monypenny, Rolvenden, friends and family joined residents to celebrate the scheme's 40th anniversary. Led by a resident (with help and encouragement from the handyman and scheme manager) the successful event raised funds, to put towards improvements in the communal lounge. This will enable more local groups to make use of the room for their events and help to bring the communities closer together.

A new lounge at Luckley House in Wye was completed in November 2014. Since it opened events have included live entertainment, a fish and chip supper, a Saturday dance night, hosted by one of the tenants, and regular bingo and whist, as well as weekly arts and crafts, darts, coffee morning, breakfast club, gardening club and a film club.

At Luckley House, one tenant commented "before moving to Luckley House three years ago I had spent 44 years living in an area in which I could only name a couple of neighbours. I now know over 40 people who I can call friends. I look forward to the social activities at Luckley and can honestly say that moving here was the best thing I have ever done. I regularly see my family and friends, living here has really changed my life, everyone is so friendly and the community spirit is great."

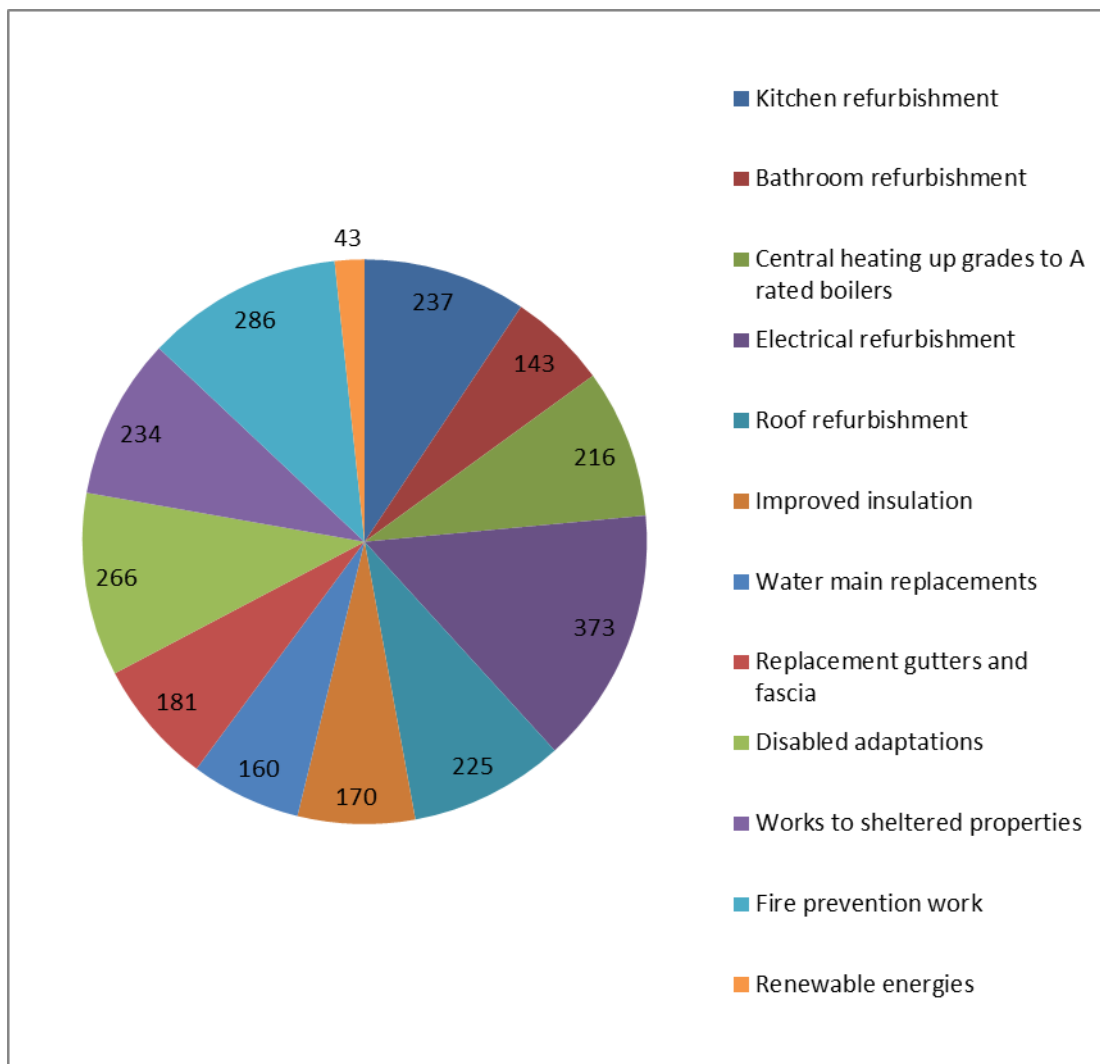
Community integration is key to the to maintain a vibrant sheltered scheme and at Gerlach House a project to teach isolated women craft and business skills is run with residents able to join in to learn a new craft or to pass on their own skills.

Bridging the ages took place when the Ruckinge Rainbows visited Cotton Hill House in Hamstreet in March 2015 with good interaction between the residents and the Rainbows.

4.3 High quality homes:

Decent homes standards – The planned maintenance programme continues to maintain the Councils own stock to a high standard meeting the Decent Homes Standard. 100% of homes had a gas safety certificate at March 2015. The chart below show the main areas of the works completed during 2014/15. Some properties may have received more than one area of work.

Number of properties that received planned maintenance works 2014/15



Park Homes – Further to the Mobile Homes Act 2013 a report was brought to Cabinet in September 2014 (minute number 123) setting out the new licencing regime and greater powers for monitoring and enforcement of licence conditions on relevant protected sites. This provides an opportunity to improve the service offered to residents. The Charging Policy was approved at Cabinet in October 2014 (minute number 187).

4.4 Issues and Opportunities

Maintaining a high standard of living and neighbourhood environment can instil a sense of pride of place in residents and help to develop community spirit. This is developed through a number of initiatives, some of which are noted in the section above. A challenge is ensuring residents are aware of services available to them and are confident to access those services independently. For instance, a promotion campaign will be undertaken to increase understanding of the importance of home contents insurance and encourage uptake by tenants.

Working together with other agencies, for example the PCSOs joining estate inspections and the multi agency clean sweep projects, helps to increase confidence in the services and foster better community relationships.

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:

An independent review of the Housing Options Service was undertaken in 2014. This identified a number of strengths and that the team is working effectively. All services are geared towards prevention of homelessness. This includes clients being advised of all their housing options, an income and expenditure assessment to assess affordability together with a 'whole needs' assessment to see what other support may be needed and can be referred or signposted to.

Working with DWP a multi agency hub runs from Job Centre Plus to facilitate joint working to assist people into employment. The welfare intervention officers continue to assist people affected by changes to their benefit. They had 270 referrals but also assisted a number of additional residents where their queries were easier to resolve. The officers have noted an increase in people coming to them with mental health problems.

Each housing option officer works generically with a specific responsibility for a particular client group; mental health, young people, ex-offenders and domestic abuse. This enables close working relationships to be formed with a range of agencies and personnel as well as the wider Housing Options Team to look proactively for suitable options within the private rented sector. The specific officer approach has been well received by agencies as they now have a recognised named contact to get in touch with when they are working with a client who needs housing assistance. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of "homeless tonight" cases approaching from these areas

5.2 Accommodation for homeless households:

Temporary accommodation – The purchase of Christchurch House was reported in the last Annual review. The refurbishment is complete and Christchurch House now provides quality short-term accommodation, reducing the use of bed and breakfast , for 8 families.

<p>One resident staying at Christchurch House with her mother and three children, said "we were dreading going into B&B but when we walked into the house everyone was really friendly. The facilities are lovely; it's great to be able to cook a proper meal for everyone. The children are happy, they all play outside in the courtyard. We even held a birthday party in the kitchen".</p>

Properties managed under the social lettings agency and the private sector leasing scheme all contribute to the prevention of homelessness.

During 2014 there has been an ongoing review of homelessness, including a stakeholder consultation event. This will feed into the development of a refreshed Homelessness Strategy that will come forward during 2015.

Homelessness is one of the priorities of the Health and wellbeing Board and in relation to young people is included within the What Matters Forum.

5.3 Issues and Opportunities:

Although reduced on the previous year the number of households in bed and breakfast continues to fluctuate each month, ranging between 2 and 11 households a month during 2014/15. Further provision of quality temporary accommodation such as Christchurch House is needed together with suitable accommodation to move to permanently.

The cost of being homeless to health services is well documented; further engagement with health is needed to encourage the recognition of the role of housing and associated services in reducing pressures on the NHS.

Conclusion

During the last twelve months the Housing Service has continued to deliver a range of initiatives whose outcomes have contributed to achieving the five priorities both in the short, medium and long term.

Many of these are day to day activities of the service: good housing management, upkeep of council owned homes, prevention of homelessness, management of the housing register, the allocation of housing, supporting vulnerable people into settled accommodation and helping people to maintain their independence.

Projects to increase the availability of affordable housing, through new build projects and schemes such as the social letting agency (to improve access for lower incomes households to the private rented sector) are providing much needed accommodation but this is tempered by losses through the right to buy and increasing private rental costs.

Joint working and liaison with a range of other organisations is critical to achieving the five priorities. Across all housing teams there is a willingness and ability to work cooperatively with others to gain better outcomes for residents whether this is with statutory bodies, voluntary organisations or contractors.

Agenda Item No: 5
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 July 2015
Report Title: Quality Bus Partnership
Report Author: Sheila Davison, Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Heyes – Portfolio Responsibility for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety



Summary: To update members on the work of the Quality Bus Partnership, to advise of the links to other transport related committees and task groups and future developments. The need for a more detailed review of the Quality Bus Partnership is also addressed.

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Committee be asked to consider the information provided and advise officers:-**

1. if there are any specific concerns that the Committee would like to see considered by the Quality Bus Partnership;
2. if any further information is required and
3. whether the Committee wish to receive a further update in a year's time

Contacts: Sheila Davison
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Report Title: Quality Bus Partnership

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on the work of the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP), to advise of the links to other transport related committees / task groups and future developments. The need for a more detailed review of the QBP is also addressed.

Background

2. On the 23 June 2015 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for a brief information report on the QBP to enable them to consider whether a more detailed review is necessary (minute reference 45 OSC 230615). The committee commented that the partnership had been in being for in the region of ten years and raised a concern that only one operator is providing a bus substantive bus service within the borough. A concern was raised that services have recently been withdrawn from some areas of the borough.

Ashford's Bus Quality Partnership

3. Ashford's QBP brings together Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Stagecoach with the aim of:
 - a. Creating a public transport network that is an attractive alternative to private car use;
 - b. seeking to increase use of bus services to achieve a sustainable and self-sufficient transport system and
 - c. acknowledges that these aims require a high quality reliable public transport that can only be delivered through partnership work with a commitment to co-ordinated investment, bus service network planning, marketing and complementary infrastructure and bespoke initiatives.
4. The agreement contains a number of very detailed undertakings for each of the partners. A copy of the full agreement is provided at Appendix 1.
5. The partnership operates on a voluntary basis in accordance with the various transport provisions. Nothing in the agreement is legally binding on any of the parties and cannot be interpreted in any manner being restrictive to the commercial or operational activities of Stagecoach in East Kent or any other organisation.
6. It will be noted that the agreement is somewhat out of date and this is a matter being addressed by the QBP with KCC leading. We are advised that this will be brought to the next QBP meeting scheduled in September 2015.
7. It should also be noted that the aims, objectives and style of operation of QBPs seem to vary greatly across the country for example many include reducing pollution in their objectives. Ashford QBP certainly has green travel

and new travel initiatives within its remit, however, it tends to focus on current operational issues. Members should note the QBP does not address the franchising of bus services which falls to KCC.

8. It is anticipated that members' concerns regarding rural bus services will be raised at the next meeting of the QBP. The opportunity afforded by this meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss any other issues felt relevant by Overview & Scrutiny members.

Public Transport Liaison Task Group

9. It is worth mentioning that a new Task Group that has just been established by the Cabinet (minute reference 38 CA 110615). While the terms of reference have yet to be agreed its primary purpose will be to liaise with transport providers. It will give members an opportunity to examine service provision of all transport into, across or out of the borough. It is likely to have a strategic emphasis attempting to build on the advantages Ashford has in terms of location and growth potential.
10. The Chairman of the Task Group has indicated that rural transport provision will be a focus for the inaugural meeting in October 2015.

Joint Transportation Board

11. The Joint Transportation Board (JTB) is of course the main committee relevant to transportation for the borough council. Its focus is on capital and revenue funded programmes, traffic regulation orders and street management proposals. It provides advice on these matters to the relevant Executives as appropriate.
12. The JTB essentially provides a forum for consultation between KCC and the Council on policies, plans and strategies related to highways road traffic and public transport. It reviews progress and out-turn of works and business performance.
13. An important role for the JTB is to recommend and advise on the prioritization of bids for future programmes of work. It also receives reports on highways and transportation needs within the borough and as such there is a link between the JTB and QBP, the new liaison task group and others such as the taxi forum.

Other matters to consider

14. Within the borough council, the Health, Parking and Community Safety Service recently took over responsibility for the day to day work associated with parking, highways & transport. This has provided an opportunity for new managers to review the policies and procedures in operation that cover this area of work. While this is very much an on-going process it has already resulted in significant change relevant especially to parking. It is anticipated what we will see over the next 12 months more change will happen and report as applicable to members.

Conclusion

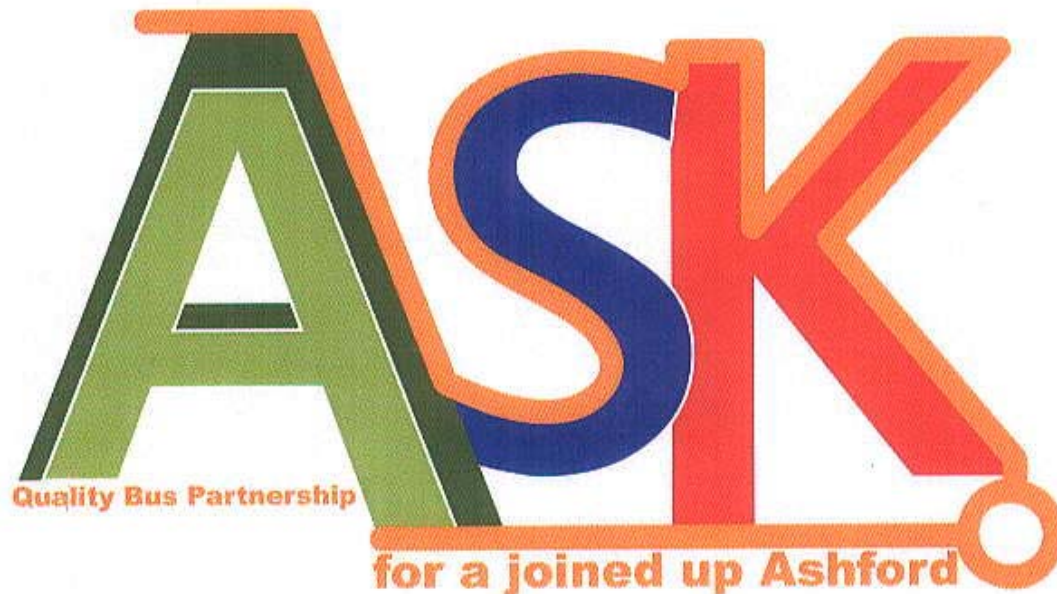
15. The work of the QBP is important and provides a positive environment in which KCC, the Council and Stagecoach can work together to the benefit of our community. Other groups are, however, equally involved in promoting of an effective, efficient and sustainable public transport system. There has been, and will continue to be, change over the next year while the new managers review the service and work with partners to do things in a different way.
16. This meeting is an opportunity to raise areas of concern and consider how best to move forward.

Recommendation

17. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee schedule in a more in depth review of the QBP in a year's time.

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AASK is a Quality Bus Partnership between Ashford Borough Council, Ashford's Future, Stagecoach and Kent County Council.

The partners have joined together and committed to improving bus services for the growing town of Ashford.

ASHFORD QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

AGREEMENT

9 FEBRUARY 2009

A Protocol between Stagecoach in East Kent, Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board

The partnership to achieve quality local bus services in the Ashford Borough

1. Statement of Principles

Stagecoach in East Kent, Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board share the common objectives of:

- 1.1. Creating a public transport network acknowledged by local residents, visitors and the business community as an increasingly attractive alternative to private car use.
- 1.2. Seeking increased use of local bus services to assist in achieving a sustainable and self-sufficient transport system, capable of meeting the needs of the 21st century, enriching the quality of life in the Ashford Borough, attracting investment, enhancing work and leisure opportunities, and helping to ensure that **Ashford is best placed** for growth in the South-East.
- 1.3. All four parties to this protocol acknowledge that these objectives require high quality reliable public transport that can only be delivered through working in partnership, with a commitment to co-ordinated investment, bus service network planning, marketing and complementary infrastructure and bespoke initiatives.

2. Framework for Action

- 2.1. The bus network within Ashford Borough has been identified as being appropriate for a joint commitment to invest and to upgrade facilities and operations, together with improved and imaginative marketing, which can contribute to the target growth.
- 2.2. Significant investment is already underway, with £1 million of Kickstart capital funding provided by KCC for the supply and delivery of 10 new low-floor easy-access vehicles for the A-line route; investment in bus route roadside infrastructure to improve conditions at bus stops and to ensure accessibility for all; and further investment in new vehicles for the KCC-tendered network in Ashford, ensuring that most of the town's routes are now served by low-floor, easy-access buses.

- 2.3 All parties to this protocol will work actively together to plan and establish a viable and accessible bus service network for the Ashford Borough area. All parties will work together on proposed changes to bus services, marketing and fares in any part of the network; and each party will have an input into the establishment of new, and amendment to existing, bus services. The parties to this protocol will be expected to reach consensus agreement on the above before plans are implemented.

3. Agreements of this Protocol

The four parties to this protocol agree to:

- 3.1 Work together to implement a substantial improvement to bus operating infrastructure, including stops, shelters, passenger information, accessibility
- 3.2 Work together and introduce innovations such as alternative environmentally friendly fuels, market sensitive fares including innovative ticketing (recognising that the level of fares in Ashford Borough is below the UK average) and improved information, including the extension of the existing real time information system, to ensure that the Statement of Principles and Targets of the protocol are delivered
- 3.3 Seek to deliver by a partnership approach and through market research and similar consultative measures, opportunities for the introduction of new or revised local bus services, which would increase the use of public transport
- 3.4 Seek to identify through market surveys and public attitude studies the means to increase the quality and availability of public transport services in the Ashford Borough
- 3.5 Seek to co-ordinate the development of the public transport network with land use planning to maximise the opportunities for local bus and rail services
- 3.6 Seek to co-ordinate the public transport network with other forms of transport to achieve maximum travel opportunities for the Ashford Borough
- 3.7 Seek to implement a Performance Improvement Partnership
- 3.8 Work with Tenterden Town Council and Parish Councils within the Ashford Borough and other representative organisations to exchange information and assist in the improvement of infrastructure and local transport information
- 3.9 The responsibility for organising and administering the meetings of the Partnership to be undertaken by KCC's Sustainable Transport Team

4. Ashford Borough Council, Ashford's Future Partnership Board and Kent County Council will:

- 4.1 Plan and progressively introduce, where possible, a series of bus priority and other measures, to improve the timing, punctuality and reliability of local bus services
- 4.2 Seek to ensure that both existing and new developments are accessible to the local bus service network for journeys to and from the historic town and commercial centre of Ashford, and to and from Ashford's expanding residential

and commercial areas, as well as to and from Tenterden Town and the other Parishes of the Borough; and to seek Section 106 developer contributions towards new or improved public transport infrastructure and/or services wherever appropriate

- 4.3 Seek funding for public transport facilities such as bus shelters, information and bus priorities commensurate with investment and other measures taken by Stagecoach in East Kent in improving local bus services
- 4.4 Secure, implement and maintain suitable attractive and appropriate arrangements for the provision of information and roadside infrastructure (stops and shelters) to a standard agreed between the partners, with Kent County Council to be responsible for damaged bus stop posts and hardstanding through its Roadside Infrastructure Unit contract; and Ashford Borough Council to be responsible for maintenance of its shelters
- 4.5 Assist in identifying new market opportunities for local bus services and support new initiatives to encourage greater use of public transport, including Green Travel Plans for employers and education establishments, especially in new developments identified as part of Ashford's future growth area
- 4.6 Give advance notice of roadworks affecting bus services and make every reasonable endeavour to safeguard bus access in cases of road closures or diversions, and ensure that the public are adequately informed of alternative arrangements, by means of information on stops and buses, and via Traveline, and by any other methods considered appropriate
- 4.7 Provide bus stop clearways operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as well as other relevant infrastructure improvements to enhance bus access to stops (Kent County Council); and to provide additional resources for parking enforcement, especially of bus stop clearways (Ashford Borough Council).
- 4.8 Ashford's Future Partnership Board will promote major new developments with due regard for the needs of bus route priorities and the provision of appropriate bus route infrastructure such as raised kerbs, bus shelters and bus stop clearways.

5. Stagecoach in East Kent will:

- 5.1 Work in partnership with and consult with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board over the design, planning and implementation of a viable and sustainable network of local bus services, adopting a consistent marketing brand for the Ashford town network; and establish appropriate co-ordination with other public transport facilities, especially rail services
- 5.2 Work with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board to provide input into the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) so that the benefits of improvements introduced through this protocol can be measured in terms of patronage figures
- 5.3 Introduce where commercially feasible improved local bus services in line with the introduction of priority measures, automatic vehicle location systems and other new features which contribute to more efficient public transport operation

- 5.4 Seek to maintain all services in the Ashford Borough with minimum lost mileage and to a professional standard. As a minimum standard Stagecoach in East Kent will achieve standards of operation set by the Traffic Commissioner in accordance with NI 178
- 5.5 Invest in new and fully accessible fuel-efficient vehicles, as well as presenting existing vehicles in an attractive manner
- 5.6 Consult with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board on any significant proposed fare changes
- 5.7 Continue to develop higher standards of training and education amongst staff, including an understanding of passenger transport operation and customer care
- 5.8 Provide adequate management and supervision of services to uphold standards as well as being able to deal with emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances quickly and efficiently
- 5.9 Work in partnership with KCC to deliver and be responsible for maintenance of timetable displays, timetable display cases and bus stop flags at bus stops served only by Stagecoach routes; bus stops on routes served by KCC-tendered services will be maintained by the appointed Roadside Infrastructure Unit contractor
- 5.10 Work in partnership with KCC in rolling out ITSO-certified Electronic Ticket Machines (ETMs) with Smartcard readers and GPS/GPRS transmitters on all service vehicles from summer 2009. This project will generate significant benefits to passengers and bus operators, including reduced bus stop dwell times, more effective delivery and administration of concessionary travel schemes and enhanced information on patronage, network performance and the identification of incidents and congestion

Important Note:

This is a Voluntary Partnership Agreement in accordance with the provisions of the Transport Act 2000 and the Local Transport Act 2008. As such it is an agreement in which each of the parties is a voluntary partner.

Therefore, nothing in this agreement is designed or should be concluded as being legally binding on any of the parties, or in any manner being restrictive to the commercial or operational activities of Stagecoach in East Kent or any other organisation.

ASHFORD QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

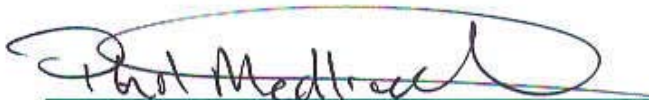
Signed this 9th day of FEBRUARY 2009



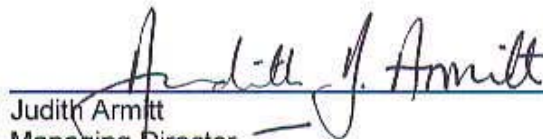
County Councillor Charles Hibberd
Lead Member for Environment, Highways and Waste
Kent County Council



Councillor Paul Clokie
Leader, Ashford Borough Council



Phil Medlicott
Managing Director
Stagecoach in East Kent



Judith Armit
Managing Director
Ashford's Future Company Ltd

6. Aims and Measures of the Quality Bus Partnership

All four parties to the protocol agree to work together using the following aims and measures of the Quality Bus Partnership:

(M1) Percentage increase in number of passenger journeys since 2008

The increase in the number of passenger journeys in recent years has been due to a number of factors, principal among them being the improvement in the level of service offered and the introduction of concessionary fares, which was first introduced county-wide in 2006 and England-wide in 2008. However, there are serious funding issues relating to the latter of these factors which are still to be resolved. The target figures predict a modest growth in passenger journeys on the baseline figure for 2008.

Target is 9% over the first 3 years

(M2) Percentage increase in number of multi-journey ticket sales since 2008

The very successful marketing undertaken by the operator has generated a significant growth in the sale of multi-journey tickets, especially the weekly Megarider ticket and Plusbus tickets. The expected growth in passenger numbers would also be expected to increase these sales further.

Target is 9% over the first 3 years

(M3) Increase of passengers expressing satisfaction with service provided since 2008

Bus passenger satisfaction rates would be expected to grow alongside the planned improvements that the QBP seeks to implement during the next three years. The parties to the agreement will seek to arrange a passenger satisfaction survey at an appropriate time.

7. Targets for Next Three Years

All four parties to the protocol agree to work together towards achieving the following targets for the next three years:

(T1) Percentage of services operating on time

Poor punctuality is due to many factors, including the increasing number of vehicles on the road and inconsiderate parking and loading at bus stops. We need to focus on better enforcement of illegal parking at bus stops and more rigorous monitoring of why and when delays happen, so that problems causing late running can be resolved.

Target is to build up to 95% within the first three years, as determined by NI 178 of not less than 1 minute early and not more than 5 minutes late

(T2) Number of stops with improved accessibility

Raised kerbs give better access at bus stops, especially for passengers with limited mobility and for parents with children in buggies. The standard measurement for raised kerbs should be 160mm, which meets the

requirements of the highway authority and of the bus operator, especially with the increase in the number of low-floor buses which can be prevented from accessing the bus stop parallel to the pavement if the raised kerb is higher than this. A programme of bus stop clearways is planned for 2009/10, which should at last provide the supporting infrastructure which the bus operator needs to provide a reliable, accessible service. The provision of bus stop clearways is paramount, and these should continue to be introduced at all urban bus stops as soon as resources permit. Equally important is their enforcement by parking officers, so as to ensure that all bus stops are kept clear of all other vehicles at all times. The provision of dedicated loading bays in busy shopping areas will often assist with this, providing the road space needed for delivery vehicles to supply retail premises.

Target is 67 stops in year 1, with the majority of the remaining stops in the urban area to be completed in years 2 and 3; and 100% of clearways to be 24/7 and accessible by end of year 3.

(T3) Number of stops with timetable information

The provision of clear and accurate timetable information at most bus stops is an essential part of public transport provision, and the operator has commenced a considerable improvement in the provision of timetable information in the Ashford area. The completion of this project at most bus stops should enhance the attractiveness of local bus services, and increase patronage. Priority will be given to the urban stops, with stops in the rural areas of Ashford Borough to follow.

Target is 155 stops in year 1, 195 stops in year 2, and 235 stops in year 3, out of a total of 264 marked stops in the urban area. There are also 145 marked stops in the rural area, which are primarily the responsibility of KCC.

(T4) Number of stops with new or replacement shelters

The provision of shelters at all principal pick-up stops is an important facility for encouraging an increase in bus passengers. Combined with the elements of roadside infrastructure described above, a bus shelter provides essential protection from inclement weather, especially for the elderly, for those who are less mobile, and for parents with young children.

Clear Channel is currently responsible for 70 bus shelters within the built up area of Ashford (including the 2 new shelters in Elwick Road directly outside the County Square Shopping Centre which were GAF/Interreg funded). Clear Channel has also agreed to take on the maintenance of 4 new Developer funded bus shelters in Trinity Road. In addition Ashford Borough Council maintains 16 bus shelters within the built up area of Ashford, many of which will soon need replacing.

Ashford Borough Council has therefore set aside £50,000 for the provision of 3 new bus shelters over the next 3 years, and it is expected that a further 3 bus shelters will be provided by developers during the same period.

Target is 2 new shelters in year 1, 2 new shelters in year 2, and 2 new shelters in year 3.

(T5) Projected dates for conversion of Ashford inter-urban routes to low-floor easy-access vehicles

Stagecoach in East Kent desires to convert the following routes to low-floor easy-access vehicles by 2012 subject to funding:

<i>Route 10</i>	<i>Ashford-Hythe-Folkestone</i>
<i>Route 400</i>	<i>Ashford-Tenterden-Rolvenden</i>
<i>Route 510</i>	<i>Ashford-Lenham-Maidstone</i>
<i>Route 652</i>	<i>Ashford-Wye-Canterbury</i>

(T6) Percentage of drivers with NVQ Level 2 in Road Passenger Transport

The investment provided by the operator in its workforce reflects their commitment to a reliable, customer oriented service, and is to be welcomed and encouraged

Target is 40% in year 1, 50% in year 2, and 60% in year 3

8. Additional Improvements to the Bus Network

All four parties to the protocol will work towards the following additional improvements to the bus network insofar as the provision of funding permits:

- 8.1 Stagecoach in East Kent and Kent County Council to ensure that service quality and reliability is maintained
- 8.2 Kent County Council to ensure that service performance of financially supported services continues to be monitored
- 8.3 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board to maximise developer contributions for the provision of public transport services, infrastructure and information
- 8.4 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board and Kent County Council to continue to plan the development of the Smartlink bus project, linking projected new housing development with the town centre and international station
- 8.5 Kent County Council to carry out an audit of all remaining bus stops as part of the Roadside Infrastructure Unit contract
- 8.6 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board to review car parking quantity and pricing policies within the context of future town centre regeneration
- 8.7 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board to develop new park and ride provision at appropriate out of town sites, with aim of reducing town centre parking capacity and increasing out-of-town parking capacity
- 8.8 Kent County Council and Stagecoach in East Kent to explore inter-availability of certain SEK tickets on non-SEK services
- 8.9 To extend the provision of real time information throughout the Ashford Borough area

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 This Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) sets out the aims, measures and targets which will form the basis of the Ashford QBP. Provided there is commitment from all four parties to the protocol, the bus passenger network in the Ashford Borough area should enjoy significant new initiatives, improvements and investment in the immediate future.
 - 9.2 The development of the Smartlink network of bus services should then continue alongside the further growth of Ashford, providing a modern network of town bus services with S106 developer support. Such financial pump-priming should enable the new Smartlink network to move towards commercial viability over time.
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Agenda Item No: 6
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 July 2015
Report Title: Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012
Report Author: Caroline Carney, Procurement Officer, Community and Housing
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Shorter – Portfolio Finance, Budget and Resource Management



Summary:	To update members on how the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 is being implemented.
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Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Committee be asked to consider the information provided and advise officers:-**

1. If Members would like to consider developing corporate Social Value priorities to reflect our organisational priorities and the needs of the local area.
2. if any further information is required, and
3. whether the Committee wish to receive a further update in a year's time

Contacts: Caroline Carney
caroline.carney@ashford.gov.uk - Tel: (01233) 330605

Report Title: Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on how the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 was being implemented and whether the Council were deriving all available benefits.

Background

2. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 (the Act) received Royal Assent on 8th March 2012, and was brought fully into force by commencement order on 31st January 2013.

The Act places a requirement on commissioners to consider the economic, environmental and social benefits of their approaches to procurement before the process starts.

“Social Value” is a way of thinking about how scarce resources are allocated and used. It involves looking beyond the price of each individual contract and looking at what the collective benefit to a community is when we choose to award a contract. Social value asks the question: “If £1 is spent on the delivery of services, can that same £1 be used, to also produce a wider benefit to the community ?”

Although the Act only applies to the pre-procurement stage of certain public services contracts (because this is where the social value can be considered to greatest effect) as a matter of good practice, commissioners in the council are also encouraged to consider Social Value for all procurement activity including Works contracts.

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 is attached in Appendix A.

Application of the Public Services (Social Value Act) 2012

3. Traditionally, within the council tenders have been evaluated on price only. Evaluating tenders using a combination of “Quality” (incorporating Social Value) and “Price”, otherwise known as MEAT (Most Economically Advantageous Tender) has changed the way procurements are dealt with.

Consideration at pre-procurement stage is given to how Social Value can benefit the wider community. The pre-procurement stage of the commissioning process is where services are conceived and are designed, specifications developed and engagement with partners, stakeholders and current and potential providers take place. Officers are encouraged to consider what benefits can be realised from the procurement, and how specific evaluation questions can be ‘weighted’ and criteria developed to judge the most advantageous tender.

These additional benefits can take almost any form, ranging from the very tangible, such as apprenticeships or training, sub-contracting opportunities for small businesses, to softer, but equally important benefits such as engagement with communities or groups of individuals.

A number of examples are listed below, and some have been used in procurements within the council;

- Creating skills and training opportunities (e.g. apprenticeships or on the job training);
- Creating employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed or NEETs (those not in education, employment or training);
- Offering work placements to school children and young adults;
- Creating supply chain opportunities for SMEs and social enterprises;
- Encouraging community engagement;
- Encouraging ethical and fair trade purchasing

The following example details data gathered during works which were commissioned in 2014/15. A specific question was asked during the tender process around the use of apprenticeships and training for staff working on kitchen and bathroom refurbishment works to council housing, results below;

2014/15 Kitchen and Bathroom Refurbishment	Contractor					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Number of staff working on ABC contracts	37	31	6	2	4	2
Number of apprentices in company	6	7	2	11	3	1
Number of apprentices working on ABC contracts	6	1	1	1	1	1
Current apprentice/training scheme provider	West, East Kent & Ashford College	CITB	CTS Ltd.	Various	CITB	in house
Average number of hours apprentices spend in an educational setting per working week	1 day	7	8	8	9	4
Number of directly employed 'local' staff working on ABC contracts	21	7	0	0	4	0
Number of sub-contracted 'local' staff working on ABC contracts	10	25	0	0	0	2

When approaching procurement, consideration is given to the type of organisation that may be interested in the contract. Understanding who might be attracted by the opportunity and ultimately who might be able to deliver it is extremely important. For example, if it is for an extremely complex or high value works contract, then we may require a minimum number of new employee apprenticeships, etc. to be delivered through the contract. If the contract is a smaller services contract we consider whether small businesses and community or voluntary organisations could deliver it.

To help in this approach all procurements with an estimated value of £15,000 or greater are advertised on a regional procurement portal, creating a transparent process and opening up the opportunity to small and local businesses. (Projects with a lesser value can also be advertised if required). The use of 'Constructionline' (the government's pre-qualification database of contractors), for construction related projects aids contractors bidding for work, as it reduces time and costs completing a long pre-qualification questionnaire, and helps the council as the contractors have already been vetted.

Data is also being collected as part of the Corporate Contracts Register which details if the supplier who is undertaking a project is a SME (Small and Medium Sized Enterprise) or Voluntary, or Charitable Organisation.

Other matters to consider

4. As with many elements of procurement law there is limited guidance as to how to establish whether something is, or is not linked to the subject matter of the contract. To avoid any challenges care should be taken to analyse what we are seeking to commission, what social benefits we hope to secure and whether it can properly be said that the social issue is linked to the core requirement of the contract. Consideration of Social Value needs to be proportionate to the type, value and length of a contract. Each project should be evaluated on an individual basis, rather than a one size fits all approach for all procurements.
5. Even though some commissioners may perceive the considerations of the Social Value Act difficult to achieve, we actually include elements of the Act in our procurements without specifically labelling it Social Value. To ensure that the act is considered, a consistent approach to procurements should be undertaken in the council, utilising the advice and help of the Procurement Officer and the adoption of standardised documentation which is being developed.
6. The Act does not prescribe that considerations made under it should be recorded or monitored, but as a matter of good practice, we should keep a formal record that we have made considerations under the Act, as well as the rationale for any subsequent decisions. Some data is being collected on the benefits derived from applying the Act but a consistent and robust approach to post-procurement activity is to be developed by the Procurement Officer to evidence and measure outcomes and any resulting benefits from the procurement, without getting bogged down in bureaucracy.
7. Small Businesses and Social Enterprises have to negotiate numerous hurdles to bid for works. For transparency, and again to avoid challenge commissioners should ensure the contract requirements that are put in place

are not too onerous for smaller businesses and social enterprises to fulfil, for example request a high level of public liability insurance.

Conclusion

8. Recent research by Social Enterprise UK Wates Living Space, Orbit Group, PwC and the Chartered Institute of Housing revealed that;
 - Delivering social value improves community relations for local authorities and housing associations
 - Definition and measurement of social value are the main barriers to implementation
 - Social value can deliver cost savings and better services
9. Commissioning, and particularly the procurement process, has not traditionally been seen as an inherently creative cycle of activity. However, the process can be used to produce a wider benefit to the community.
10. Including social value requirements in a contract doesn't guarantee outcomes. Officers need to make sure the outcomes are delivered and proven, and manage the contract with the successful contractor in a way that enables the maximum social value to be realised.
11. Social value is being considered in all relevant procurements, but consideration by members about what social value means to the council, should be undertaken with a view to developing our own social value priorities, specifically the definition of a local supplier. These need to reflect our own organisational priorities and the needs of the local area. This will help to develop a more consistent approach to procurement with commissioners understanding the main Social Value priorities for the council.
12. Contract Procedure Rules are currently being reviewed and will include guidance on the Social Value Act, the use of this legislation can provide the legal context which supports local procurement

Recommendation

13. That Cabinet considers developing and defining corporate Social Value priorities which reflect our organisational priorities and local needs.
14. Review of the Corporate Procurement Strategy to be undertaken in October 2015. The review to include the development and production of a brief strategy document on Social Value detailing our corporate priorities and providing guidance and training to commissioners.
15. Review the outcomes from the Social Value Act in a year's time.

Contact: **Caroline Carney**

Email: caroline.carney@ashford.gov.uk



Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

2012 CHAPTER 3

An Act to require public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts; and for connected purposes.

[8th March 2012]

BE IT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1 Contracts of relevant authorities

- (1) If a relevant authority proposes to procure or make arrangements for procuring the provision of services, or the provision of services together with the purchase or hire of goods or the carrying out of works, by—
 - (a) entering into a public services contract that is not a contract based on a framework agreement, or
 - (b) concluding a framework agreement as regards which public services contracts are likely to constitute the greater part by value of the contracts based on the agreement,

it must comply with the requirements in subsections (3), (6) and (7) before starting the process of procurement.

- (2) The authority is to be treated for the purposes of subsection (1) as having started the process of procurement as regards what is proposed to be procured as soon as it takes whichever of the following steps is the first to occur—
 - (a) sending a notice to the Official Journal of the European Union for the purpose of inviting tenders, requests to be selected to tender or to negotiate or requests to participate in relation to a public services contract or framework agreement relating to what is proposed to be procured;
 - (b) publishing an advertisement seeking offers or expressions of interest in relation to such a contract or framework agreement;
 - (c) contacting a person in order to seek an offer or expression of interest in relation to such a contract or framework agreement;
 - (d) contacting a person in order to respond to an unsolicited offer or expression of interest in relation to such a contract or framework agreement;
 - (e) entering into such a contract or concluding such a framework agreement.
- (3) The authority must consider—
 - (a) how what is proposed to be procured might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area, and
 - (b) how, in conducting the process of procurement, it might act with a view to securing that improvement.

- (4) In subsection (3) “the relevant area” means the area consisting of the area or areas of the one or more relevant authorities on whose behalf a public services contract is, or contracts based on a framework agreement are, intended to be made.
- (5) For the purposes of subsection (4) the area of a relevant authority is an area consisting of the area or areas by reference to which the authority primarily exercises its functions, disregarding any areas outside the United Kingdom.
- (6) The authority must consider under subsection (3)(b) only matters that are relevant to what is proposed to be procured and, in doing so, must consider the extent to which it is proportionate in all the circumstances to take those matters into account.
- (7) The authority must consider whether to undertake any consultation as to the matters that fall to be considered under subsection (3).
- (8) If an urgent need to arrange the procurement in question makes it impractical to comply with the requirements in subsections (3), (6) and (7) before the time indicated by subsection (1), a relevant authority may disregard the requirements to the extent that it is not practical to comply with them.
- (9) Subsection (8) does not apply to the extent that the time available is reduced by undue delay on the part of the authority after this section has come into force.
- (10) Failure to comply with subsection (1), (3), (6) or (7) does not affect the validity of anything done in order to comply with the Regulations.
- (11) The following are not required to comply with subsections (1), (3), (6) and (7)—
 - (a) the Welsh Ministers;
 - (b) the First Minister for Wales;
 - (c) the Counsel General to the Welsh Assembly Government;
 - (d) the National Assembly for Wales Commission;
 - (e) a relevant authority whose functions are wholly or mainly Welsh devolved functions.
- (12) For the purposes of subsection (11) a function of a relevant authority is a Welsh devolved function if—
 - (a) provision conferring or imposing that function upon the authority is within the legislative competence of the National Assembly for Wales, or
 - (b) provision conferring or imposing that function upon the authority is made by the Welsh Ministers.
- (13) This section has effect in relation to a relevant authority’s proposed procurement or arrangements for procurement only if the public services contract or framework agreement in contemplation is such that the Regulations would have effect in relation to it.
- (14) If anything done before the commencement of this section would to any extent have satisfied the requirements in subsections (1), (3), (6) and (7) if done after that commencement, the requirements are to that extent to be treated as satisfied.
- (15) In this section—

“framework agreement” has the same meaning as in the Regulations, and a reference to a contract based on a framework agreement is a reference to a contract entered into on terms established by such an arrangement;

“public services contract” has the same meaning as in the Regulations (and includes a contract that is treated as being a public services contract by the Regulations);

“the Regulations” means the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (S.I. 2006/5), or any regulations replacing those regulations, as from time to time amended;

“relevant authority” means a person or body that is a contracting authority for the purposes of the Regulations.

2 Local authority contracts

In section 17 of the Local Government Act 1988 (exclusion of non-commercial considerations in the case of local and other public authority contracts), after subsection (10) insert—

“(11) This section does not prevent a public authority to which it applies from exercising any function regulated by this section with reference to a non-commercial matter to the extent that the authority

considers it necessary or expedient to do so to enable or facilitate compliance with a duty imposed on it by section 1 of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.”

3 Financial provisions

There is to be paid out of money provided by Parliament any expenditure incurred in consequence of this Act by a Minister of the Crown, government department or other public authority.

4 Short title, commencement and extent

- (1) This Act may be cited as the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.
- (2) Section 3 and this section come into force on the day on which this Act is passed.
- (3) Sections 1 and 2 come into force on such day as a Minister of the Crown may by order made by statutory instrument appoint.
- (4) This Act extends to England and Wales.

Agenda Item No: 7
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 July 2015
Report Title: Budget Scrutiny Task Group
Report Author: Member Services and Scrutiny Manager



Summary:	The O&S Committee is asked to agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group which will scrutinise the Council's draft 2016/17 budget and report its findings and recommendations to the O&S Committee. The O&S Committee would then report to Cabinet on the soundness of the budget.
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Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The O&S Committee to agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group.**

Policy Overview: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Council's draft Capital and Revenue budget.

Financial Implications: N/A

Risk Assessment No

Equalities Impact Assessment No

Other Material Implications: None

Exemption Clauses: N/A

Background Papers: None

Contacts: Keith Fearon 01233 330564

Report Title: Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to propose the O&S committee agree to delegate the scrutiny of the Council's draft 2016/17 budget to a Task Group (the Budget Scrutiny Task Group) as it has done in the past. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group would report back to the main Committee.

Background

2. As set out in the Council's constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Capital and Revenue budgets of the Council. In the past, the Budget Scrutiny Task Group has fulfilled this function by scrutinising the Council's draft Capital and Revenue budgets, making a judgement on them, and reporting back to the main O&S Committee.
3. There is now a need for a Task Group to be set up in preparation for the scrutiny of the draft 2016/17 budget.
4. The report from the Task Group may make recommendations to both the O&S Committee itself and also to Cabinet. Once endorsed by the main Committee the report is then forwarded to Cabinet.

Membership, Timetable and Meetings

5. The political make up of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group will be broadly politically balanced and comprise of five Members - three Conservative Members and two Members from the remaining groups on the Committee.
6. The provisional timetable for 2016/17 is as follows:-

Report on Draft Budget Proposals to Cabinet	3 December 2015
Budget Scrutiny Process	After 3 Dec 2015
Task Group to report back to O&S	26 Jan 2016
O&S Budget report to Cabinet	11 Feb 2016
Full Council – set council tax	18 Feb 2016

7. In 2015/16 the Budget Scrutiny Task Group met five times between 8 Dec 2014 and 13 Jan 2015, all the meetings took place during the day. Because of the Christmas break, this is quite an intense set of meetings. The Task Group reported back to the main O&S Committee on 27th January 2015. The final report from O&S to Cabinet, making two recommendations, was agreed by Cabinet.
8. With the help of Finance officers, Heads of Service and other officers, the Task Group examines all the Service budgets and reports back any areas of concern.

9. Any risks identified are put into a 'risk matrix' to show the likely probability of an issue occurring and the material impact it would have on the Council's budget if it did occur.

Conclusion

10. The O&S Committee is asked to agree to the setting up of a Task Group to scrutinise the Council's draft 2016/17 budget, and the following details of the Task Group :-
 - a. Membership to be broadly politically balanced (3 Conservative and 2 other), individual members of Task Group to be agreed
 - b. Substitutes be allowed
 - c. Other members of the Council may attend Task Group meetings and ask questions
 - d. The Task Group elects its own chairman
 - e. The Task Group may co-opt other Members (except members of the Cabinet) as non-voting members when it is considered appropriate
11. It is hoped that the membership of the Task Group can be decided at this meeting. Cllr Krause has already signified his wish to be a member of the Task Group and other Members are encouraged to contact the Member Services and Scrutiny Manager before the meeting if they wish to express their interest. (This would not mean that other Members would be unable to put themselves forward at the meeting itself.)
12. The Committee may also consider it desirable to arrange a briefing meeting of the Task Group with the Head of Finance and Service Heads?? in advance of the Budget Scrutiny process commencing. This has been done in the past following the elections and Members said at that time that they considered it to be beneficial.

Recommended that:

- (i) the Committee appoint a Budget Scrutiny Task Group comprised of 5 Members (3 Conservative, 2 Opposition) to review the 2016/17 draft budget.**
- (ii) agree the Members to be appointed.**
- (iii) consider whether a briefing session should be arranged with Service Manager prior to the commencement of the scrutiny process.**

Contact: Keith Fearon

Email: keith.fearon@ashford.gov.uk

21 July 2015

Future Reviews and Report Tracker

1. The current Year Plan for 2015/16 and the report tracker is attached to this report. This has been amended to add the three items raised at the meeting on 23 June regarding the Quality Bus Partnership, Emergency Planning and Implementing the Social Value Act 2012.
2. Short reports on the Quality Bus Partnership and the Social value Act 2012 are included within the agenda for this meeting. A paper on Emergency Planning will be coming to the Committee in September.
3. The Committee is asked to consider whether there are any other items they wish to suggest that the Committee considers for review as part of its 2015/16 work programme. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. The Committee will need to agree any items put forward for review.

Recommendation

The Committee has asked to consider:-

- **Items for future review or report.**

Keith Fearon
Member Services and Scrutiny Manager
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Year Plan 2015/16

Month	items	Task Group
June	O&S Annual Report 2015/15 Sickness and Absenteeism Annual Report	
July	Formation of Budget Scrutiny Task Group Annual Report on the Housing Framework Quality Bus Partnership Implementing the Social Value Act 2012	
August		
September	3 Year Review of Mayoralty ABC Business Plan Performance Report International House – report on full years trading Disabled Adaptions Emergency Planning	
October		
November	ABC Business Plan Performance Report	
December		Council's draft 2016/17 budget - Budget Scrutiny TG meetings
January	Budget Scrutiny Report	Budget Scrutiny TG meetings
February	ABC Business Plan Performance Report Community Safety Partnership – Annual Update	
March		
April		
May	ABC Business Plan Performance Report	

O&S Committee – Report Tracker – Current position

Minute No.	Report Title	Officer	Date due	Current position	Recommended action
405/04/14	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	Member Services and Scrutiny Manager	May/June 2015	On the agenda for June 2015	Timetable for May/June each year
142/09/12	O&S Review of Mayoralty – Further Review - 2015	Member Services and Scrutiny Manager	Sept 2015	In 2010 the O&S Task examined the Mayoralty and put forward changes to make savings in line with Business Plan at that time. The operation of the service following the changes was reviewed in September 2012. A further review was requested in 3 years.	
431/04/12	ABC Business Plan performance reports – 2013/14	Policy & Performance Officer	Sept/Nov/ Feb/ May	The report comes before the O&S Committee following consideration by the Cabinet.	
398/03/13	Refurbishment of the Stour Centre	TBA	TBA	Final Report from Task Group to be presented to O&S	
367/02/15	Community Safety Partnership – annual update	Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager	February 2016	Annual update for the Committee in fulfilling its Crime and Disorder responsibilities	
216/11/13	Council play parks	TBA	TBA	Awaiting confirmation of date of report	
102/07/14	Annual report on Housing Framework	Housing Strategy Manager/Head of Housing	July 2015	Report will be on the agenda for the July meeting.	

301/12/14	Disabled Adaptations	Head of Communities and Housing	September 2015	Report to include the current policy, scheduled programme of works, spending for the last two years and planned spend and benchmarking against other authorities.	
413/3/15	Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group on HRA Business Plan – Universal Credit	Head of Communities and Housing	September 2016	The O&S Committee wishes to have an update report on the roll out of Universal Credit.	
414/3/15	Purchase of Commercial Property – International House – Update report	Head of Communities and Housing	September 2015	O&S requested a further report when the full years trading figures are available.	
44/06/15	Sickness and Absenteeism Annual Report	Head of Personnel and Development	June 2016	Further annual progress report	
45/06/15	Quality Bus Partnership	Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety	July 2015	Short briefing paper to be produced for the committee	
45/06/15	Social Value Act 2012	Head of Communities and Housing	July 2015	Short briefing paper to be produced for the committee	
45/06/15	Emergency Planning Update	Resilience Partnership Manager	September 2015	Information on response to the emergency in South Ashford in June 2015.	

