



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane,
Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL on Tuesday 22nd September 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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| 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 21 st July 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. | Emergency Planning response to Oak Tree Road Gas explosion | 1-5 |
| 5. | International House – report on full years trading | 6-16 |
| 6. | Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2014/5 and Quarter 1 2015/16 – | 17-34 |

Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items

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| 7. | Future Reviews and Report Tracker. | 35-39 |
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RR
14/9/2015

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 Committee Room No. 2 (Bad Münstereifel Room), Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the 21st July 2015.

Present:

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

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

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Howard.

Also Present:

Cllr. Clokie.

Head of Community & Housing, Head of Health Parking & Community Safety, Housing Strategy Manager, Procurement Officer, Technical Administrative Assistant, Member Services and Scrutiny Manager, Senior Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

84 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Chilton	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was a Trustee for the Ashford Volunteer Bureau.	86
Feacey	Made 'Voluntary Announcements' as he was Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Bureau, a member of the Management Committee of UK LPG, the Council's representative on the Quality Bus Partnership and Chairman of the Repton Park Community Centre.	86, 87, 88

85 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 23rd June 2015 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

86 Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-2018

The Housing Strategy Manager introduced the report which summarised the annual report of the Housing Framework 2013-2018. It highlighted 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 also recommended a review of the five priorities further to the publication of the Council's Corporate Plan.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In terms of the number of completions of affordable housing when balanced against those being sold under the Right to Buy, there had been a net gain of 55 properties between 2011-2015 (144 brought forward and 89 lost). They were expecting to complete 69 new affordable housing properties in 2015/16. This still fell somewhat short of the number the Strategic Housing Market Assessment had identified as being needed annually in the Borough.
- Downsizing as a result of the spare room subsidy had been occurring and at present there had been no increase in rental arrears. This had been encouraged by the Housing Service by way of assisted moves and swaps via mutual exchange. So there was a general movement in stock, however there did remain a shortage of available two bedroom houses and those available at affordable rent.
- Five grants of £40,000 were available for tenants in the Ashford Borough to help them purchase a home on the open market. At present there had not been any take-up of this here or in any of the neighbouring Districts where this was also available, but it was being promoted and this would continue. The deadline was March 2016.
- When Council properties had improvements undertaken this did not lead to an increase in rent for the tenant. Rents for Council properties were decided on an agreed framework.
- The items on the Action Plan that had been 'missed' or were 'to be progressed' did include actions in the summary update which could be used as a tracker going forward.
- Social Lettings and Private Sector Leasing currently had some staffing capacity to take on extra properties and did not put pressure on other areas on the Service.
- With regard to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), licences for these could be applied for anywhere in the Borough. The Article 4 direction could be used by the Council to limit the number of HMOs in a geographical area under planning law.
- The temporary accommodation at Christchurch House had been a great success. It had been used constantly with 23 families there since its opening

in September 2014. It was estimated to have already saved the General Fund approximately £100,000 in Bed & Breakfast costs. Whilst it was important not to over-provide there was some demand for a similar facility for single people as they wanted to keep Christchurch House clear for families, but this demand would be kept under review.

- The five priorities in the plan, whilst in need of review, did in the main still appear to be relevant.
- There was a recognised problem with people on housing benefit not being able to easily access private rented accommodation. There were various measures to tackle this including the ABC lettings agency, Private Sector Leasing and more affordable and extra-care housing, but these could not resolve the entire problem.
- The Council worked with the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants. In response to a question about the Volunteer Bureau's four Care Navigators who participated in this line of work, the Housing Strategy Manager said they were aware of them and she understood that they worked with the HIA so there was a link. Officers wanted to improve collaborative working in this area.
- The fuel poverty indicator was a difficult one to measure and there were no significant historical figures to refer to. The figure had remained static at 7.6% so the action plan could not say it had reduced, but this was still a good figure when compared to neighbouring Districts.
- A Member said that in terms of the trial to insulate homes this had to be approached carefully as there had been reports of such homes becoming too hot in the Summer months and causing a danger to residents in that way.

Resolved:

- That (i) the Annual Report of the Housing Framework 2013-2018 be noted and published on the Ashford Borough Council website.**
- (ii) a review of the five priorities of the Housing Framework is recommended to take place following the publication of the Council's Corporate Plan.**

87 Quality Bus Partnership

In response to a previous request by the Committee, the report updated Members on the work of the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) and advised of the links to other transport related Committees, Task Groups and future development plans. The need for a more detailed review of the QBP was also addressed.

With regard to the potential for a wider review of the QBP, the Head of Health Parking & Community Safety said she would advise against this at the present time given that: - the agreement was somewhat out of date and in need of review; changes were being implemented to the operation of the Joint Transportation Board;

there was a new Public Transport Liaison Task Group; and there had been changes within the Council with the Health, Parking and Community Safety service only recently taking over responsibility for the day to day work associated with highways and transport. Members' concerns relevant to bus transport could however be brought to the attention of the QBP.

Councillor Feacey advised that he was the Council's representative on the QBP, however all Members had the opportunity to attend the meetings and raise issues. The Ashford QBP had been recognised nationally at the UK Bus Awards and both he and the Cabinet Member were of the opinion that the Partnership had worked well and contributed to a massive improvement in local bus services in recent years.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- Stagecoach provided the vast majority of bus services in the Borough, but other providers were not precluded. Any Operator was able to bid for contracts but companies did need sufficient finance and an operating centre to keep their vehicles which made it difficult for some to compete. For subsidised services KCC ran a competitive tender exercise for each contract every four years and Kent Coach Tours operated some services under contract to KCC. Whilst in an ideal world some more competition may be healthy, Stagecoach was held to account and matters like pricing did compare well to other Districts.
- The issue of rural bus services was one that was recognised as something the Council wanted to tackle and it would be addressed through the new Public Transport Liaison Task Group.
- Stagecoach was currently in the process of forming a bus user group in the Ashford Borough where members of the public would be able to raise suggestions/concerns directly with the operator.
- The targets in the agreement for percentage of drivers with NVQ Level 2 in Road Passenger Transport were now out of date and would be considered as part of the wider review of the agreement.
- Significant Section 106 funding was made available to subsidise new bus routes, but once the subsidies ran out the routes had to be viable on their own and this was why many were reduced or withdrawn. The majority of routes within the Ashford Borough did run on a commercial basis but KCC could intervene if a service which was not commercially viable was withdrawn by the operator and KCC felt that the service was socially necessary for a community. The Technical Administrative Assistant said he would circulate a full list of current bus services in Ashford to the Committee so Members could appreciate the whole picture.
- Officers wanted to undertake a piece of work to plot a map of all of the bus routes in the Borough (particularly in and out of Parishes/villages) and find areas where there was currently poor provision. By being creative there may be wider opportunities to deliver transport by utilising things such as

community groups with vehicles, involving the taxi trade and other potential developments. There was a lot of work to do but the first step was to identify service gaps and better understand need, and Members and Parish Councils could help in that process.

- The Chairman said he would also like there to be some focus on the expectations of customers who used buses. There was quite a bit of anti-social behaviour taking place including drinking alcohol and rubbish being left and he wondered if the QBP could do anything to tackle this.
- The latest Bus Passenger Satisfaction survey carried out by Transport Focus had been published in March 2015. This was an annual survey carried out to compare and benchmark what passengers thought about their bus service. Officers agreed to circulate the results related to Ashford to Members.

Members considered that certain key routes had become elongated in recent years, with particular journeys in and out of Ashford now taking two or three times longer than they needed to. A Member said that in his view bus companies appeared to chase subsidies rather than providing the best possible routes for residents. Another Member made a specific comment about the Stagecoach No.2 Service in the mornings from Tenterden to Ashford which seemed to have joined a number of routes together and was now taking a lot longer to reach Ashford. This had resulted in a number of complaints and children being late for school. The Technical Administrative Assistant said he understood that changes were linked to East Sussex County Council withdrawing subsidy for the part of the service south of Tenterden. The Committee considered this was exactly the sort of issue that should be raised at a future QBP meeting and encouraged the Member to do so, not only for specific issues but to gain a fuller appreciation of the work undertaken by the QBP.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) the update report on the Quality Bus Partnership be received and noted.**
 - (ii) the comments made by Members in the course of the discussion be noted.**
 - (iii) a further update report be received in a year's time.**

88 Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

The Procurement Officer introduced the report that had been requested to update Members on how the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 was being implemented by the Council since being brought fully into force in January 2013. She explained that the Act placed a requirement on commissioners to consider the economic, environmental and social benefits of their approaches to procurement before the process started. Although the Act only applied to the pre-procurement stage of certain public services contracts (because this was where the social value could be considered to greatest effect), as a matter of good practice the Council's commissioners were also encouraged to consider Social Value for all procurement activity, including works contracts.

A Member said he was pleased that the Council was taking positive and proactive steps on this as there were many possible benefits. He considered the Committee should receive another report on this in a year's time to reflect on developments.

In response to a question about whether it was possible to favour local companies in procurement, the Procurement Officer said Officers were encouraged to consider what benefits could be realised from the procurement but European Union rules had to be obeyed. A Member said it was about setting specific matrices and 'weighting' questions to judge the most advantageous tender. If a company was using the local workforce or local supply chains, you could decide to mark those answers specifically highly. There were safeguards though in that decisions were open to legal challenge, there was no longer a preferred supplier list and any contract over £15,000 in value had to be advertised on the South East Business Portal.

The Committee considered it would be useful for the Council to put something in writing on the issue of Social Value, specifically with regard to the Council's own corporate priorities. Councillor Knowles said he would be happy to work with the Portfolio Holder and the Officers on this. The Chairman said that the Committee would like to receive a further update in a year's time and if they could be of any further assistance in the meantime they would be pleased to help.

Resolved:

- That (i) Councillor Knowles work with the Portfolio Holder and Officers to develop corporate Social Value priorities to reflect the Council's organisational priorities and needs**
- (ii) a further update report be received in a year's time.**

89 Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The report asked the Committee to agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group which would scrutinise the Council's draft 2016/17 budget and report its findings and recommendations back to the full Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Committee would then report to Cabinet on the soundness of the budget.

Five Members then volunteered to be Members of the Task Group and the Member Services & Scrutiny Manager advised that the main bulk of the meetings would take place during the day in December and January. A meeting would also be arranged for September/October as a 'pre-scrutiny briefing session'.

Resolved:

- That (i) the O&S Committee agree to set up a Budget Scrutiny Task Group.**
- (ii) the following be selected as Members of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group: - Councillors Burgess, Chilton, Krause, Link and Michael.**

- (iii) a briefing session should be arranged prior to the commencement of the scrutiny process.

90 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Chairman proposed that in view of the cancellation of the Cabinet in August and the holiday period, the next meeting of the Committee scheduled for 25th August should also be cancelled. This was agreed.

It was also agreed that as September was currently scheduled to be a busy meeting, the item on Disabled Adaptations should be moved back to the quieter October meeting.

The Committee also agreed to move future meetings back to the Council Chamber as it had been difficult to hear everyone speaking in the Committee Room.

Resolved:

- i) That the Committee meeting scheduled for 25th August 2015 be cancelled.**
- ii) That the item on Disabled Adaptations be moved from the September to October meeting.**
- iii) That future meetings return to the Council Chamber.**

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Danny Sheppard:
Telephone: 01233 330349 Email: danny.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees

Agenda Item No: 4
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny
Date: 22 September 2015
Report Title: Emergency Planning response to Oak Tree Road Gas explosion.
Report Author: Della Fackrell, Resilience Partnership Manager



Summary:	A brief overview of Ashford Borough Council emergency planning arrangements and specific response to the Oak Tree Road Gas explosion and fire.
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Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: Beaver Ward

Recommendations: **The Cabinet be asked to:-**
Note the contents of the report for information.

Policy Overview:

Financial Implications: None

Risk Assessment No

Equalities Impact Assessment No

Other Material Implications:

Exemption Clauses: **None**

Background Papers: None

Contacts: della.fackrell@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 330389)

Report Title: Emergency Response to Gas Explosion in Oak Tree Road

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide members with an overview of Ashford Borough Council's preparedness to respond to an incident in the borough
2. To inform members on the emergency response and recovery actions taken by ABC officers to the gas explosion incident.

Background

1. ABC has a Major Emergency Plan which was issued in January 2013 and is scheduled to be reviewed this winter. The plan includes details of specific roles and procedures that staff will follow. Each role has a detailed check list to assist staff in ensuring they cover all their actions they are responsible for.
2. To support this plan ABC have a fully resourced emergency centre which is located in Committee Room 2. There are additional telephones, stationery and white boards in the cupboard. There are also two panaboards in the room which have three separate purposes. The first provides a summary of the current situation of the incident. The Second lists focuses of our response or recovery actions. The final board shows what actions are outstanding and who has responsibility for these. These therefore provide a very good overview for our Assistant Emergency Coordinator and Information Manager on how our response is going.
3. We have developed bitesize training sessions for staff that fulfil the roles in the emergency centre, at the scene or in the welfare centre. These sessions focus on specific elements of their role which ensures they understand them before having to put them all together in response.
4. We are looking to run a live emergency centre exercise as soon as we can but clearly nothing is as good as a real emergency. We use the response to any incident to review all of our processes and procedures.
5. We are therefore holding a structured debrief on 18 September 2015 for some of the staff that responded during the Gas explosion incident. The debrief date has been delayed due to the response to Op Stack and the summer holiday period. The remainder of the staff that responded have completed a structured debrief form to ensure everyone's comments are included. These forms were also sent to the staff attending but they will be using it on the day as an aide memoire for the discussions at the structured debrief.
6. A report summarising the recommendations from staff and emergency planning will be produced and taken to management team for approval.

Key actions during the response and recovery

7. Monday 15/06/15

8. A call was made to Della Fackrell at 15:50 by Gareth Recht in the Ashford Monitoring Centre advising on information that had come across on the police radio. It was unknown at this time of the scale of the incident.
9. Further calls were made to emergency planning police and fire contacts to confirm the seriousness of the incident. It became clear that these were ABC properties and that it was unlikely that the residents would be able to return after being evacuated by the fire service. It was agreed with our partners that we would send an Incident Liaison Officer (ILO) to the scene to represent ABC. This ensured that we could have our own eyes and ears there to feed back to the emergency centre.
10. Emergency planning therefore worked on level 3 with housing colleagues to establish a rest centre to provide shelter for the evacuated residents. While this was happening other ABC officers were recruited in to their emergency planning roles and proceeded to set up the emergency centre in committee room 2.
11. The centre was ready to be used at around 1730 which meant all officers could then work from one location.
12. We set up a rest centre at Oakleigh House (Sheltered Scheme) in Beaver Lane, South Ashford as it was a short walk from the affected properties. This was a great advantage as our housing officers had easy access but the property was secure.
13. Many of the residents went to stay with relatives; one resident had been taken to East Grinstead burns unit. The housing officers had clear records of whom and where the residents were.
14. The focuses of ABC's response on this first night were:
 - the rest centre for support to the residents and public,
 - assisting in securing the site overnight through erecting heras fencing
 - Glass fragments in the area
 - Likelihood of demolition of the building
 - Advice to residents to attend Oakleigh House for further information
 - Road closure and the associated impacts
 - Consideration of the recovery phase.
15. The emergency centre was closed down at midnight as the site was secure and all of the residents were at their agreed locations.

16. Tuesday 16/06/15

17. The emergency centre opened again at 0730 ready for an update briefing from Housing and Incident Liaison Officers. This enabled all officers dealing with the recovery from the incident to ensure we delivered a coordinated and efficient response.
18. A key focus for the emergency centre now was to ensure that regular and informative updates were provided to residents, councillors and the media. The Incident Liaison Officers on site were liaising directly with the residents.

19. The police handed the site over to the HSE during the morning. Our ILO's therefore worked with the HSE officers on site feeding back to the emergency centre on any further resources

20. Wednesday 17/06/15

21. There were two main focus areas from today. Firstly working closely with the HSE and their requirements and secondly housing working with the residents for more permanent temporary accommodation.

22. Our officers were also able to obtain some key personal items from some of the affected properties which reduced the concern of some residents.

23. By the end of the working day the HSE had completed their on-site inspections and were then able to hand the site over to ABC. The emergency centre closed down overnight once the site was confirmed as secure.

24. Thursday 18/06/15

25. In addition to the ongoing issues previously mentioned our main focus on site today was ensuring that the site was made safe and to liaise with Ashford Oaks School with reference to the impact of the road closure being in place long term.

26. Demolition of the site began on this day to make the structure safe for the surrounding properties.

27. We were making arrangements with a removal company to collect as much of the tenants possessions' as we could which would be stored and returned to them as soon as possible.

28. Another addition to our focus was to ensure all residents had enough cash to get them over the weekend until bank cards etc. could be recovered. The council therefore spoke to each resident to assess and ensure they had this cash available if required.

29. The HSE had made some further requests for information which the emergency centre was able to coordinate and allocate to the correct officers.

30. Friday 19/06/15

31. By Friday the emergency centre was very much scaled down as we were dealing with the last few clean up issues and officers were starting to be able to return to business as usual for housing. The centre was therefore closed during the afternoon.

Summary

32. From an emergency planning perspective we continued to finalise some outstanding actions with the HSE, the school and road closure.

33. All through the response we were receiving constant positive feedback from the residents and partner agencies about how the council had dealt with this incident. We had acknowledged that the key element during our response was communication and our Communications team ensured that this continued every day.

34. Clearly at the time of writing this report we have not held the debrief but I am more than happy to provide a verbal update at the meeting to outline the areas highlighted that we could improve our response in the future.

Contact: Della Fackrell

Email: della.fackrell@ashford.gov.uk

Agenda Item No: 5

Report To: Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 22 September 2015

Report Title: **International House Report on Full Years Trading**

Report Author: Stewart Smith
Senior Commercial Development Manager

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Neil Shorter, Cabinet Member for Finance, Budget and Resource Management

Summary:	This report informs the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the financial outturn from International House following the first full years trading to 31.3.15
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Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: N/A

Recommendation: **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report.**

Financial Implications: The outturn for International House for the first financial period ending 31 March 2015 is £802,128, before financing. This is slightly lower than was provided for in the original budget which was £870,000 but treasury management has mitigated the impact of this.

Contact: stewart.smith@ashford.gov.uk – tel: (01233) 330828

Report Title: International House Report on Full Years Trading

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the financial outturn from International House for the period to 31.3.15.

Background

2. The Council completed the purchase of International House in April 2014 and we are now in a position to be able to report on the outturn for the first financial period ending 31.3.15.

The Financial Outturn

3. The outturn for International House for the first financial period ending 31 March 2015 is £802,128, before financing. This is slightly lower than was provided for in the original budget which was £870,000.
4. This lower than budgeted outturn is largely as a consequence of the requirement to manage a number of voids in the opening financial period as a result of the works being carried out to refurbish the first floor followed by a slower than expected uptake of the space that then became available. Local agents attributed this slight lull in the market to the usual apprehension that accompanies the build-up to the general election which coincided with the completion of the first floor works. This assessment of the situation appears to have been correct with significant take-up of the first floor units since the beginning of June this year.

First Floor Refurbishment Works

5. The first floor refurbishment works are now completed and offer a high standard of office accommodation. Please see photographs of the newly refurbished first floor at **Appendix 1**.

Current Voids

6. The uptake of the units on the first floor since the beginning of June has been good. The Schedule below shows the current available office space at International House.

Floor	Suite	Area (ft ²)	Area (m ²)	Rent (per annum)	Parking Spaces	Status
3rd	4	765	71.09	£22,797 incl	2	Available
3 rd	1A	462	42.92	£13,306 incl	1	Available
1st	Various	1335	124	£29.80 psqft incl	TBA	Available

7. Of the 1335 square foot showing as available on the first floor, 1001 square foot of that it is hoped will be let by next month with Heads of Terms having been agreed with a potential tenant and leases issued. If/once this lease completes, we already have a tenant who is looking to lease the remaining single unit of 334 square feet. This would leave just the two vacant units on the third floor totalling 1227 square feet. This is currently being marketed through a local agent.

Property Management

8. Since completing on the purchase of International House in April 2014 the Council has undertaken work to maximise the (already good) return that this asset provides. This has included
- Securing vacant possession and carrying out the refurbishment of the first floor to provide circa 5300 square foot of additional office space,
 - Reconfiguring the office accommodation on the second and third floors resulting in the creation of an additional 730 square foot of office space to let,
 - Undertaking an audit and costs cutting exercise in relation to the existing Service Charge budget for the building, and
 - Putting out to tender the property and facilities management contract which was inherited by the Council from the previous owners. This will ensure that best value and efficiencies and savings are addressed as part of the tender process.

It is anticipated that the benefit of taking these steps will be realised in the current financial period ending 31.1.16.

Recommendation

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the content of this report.

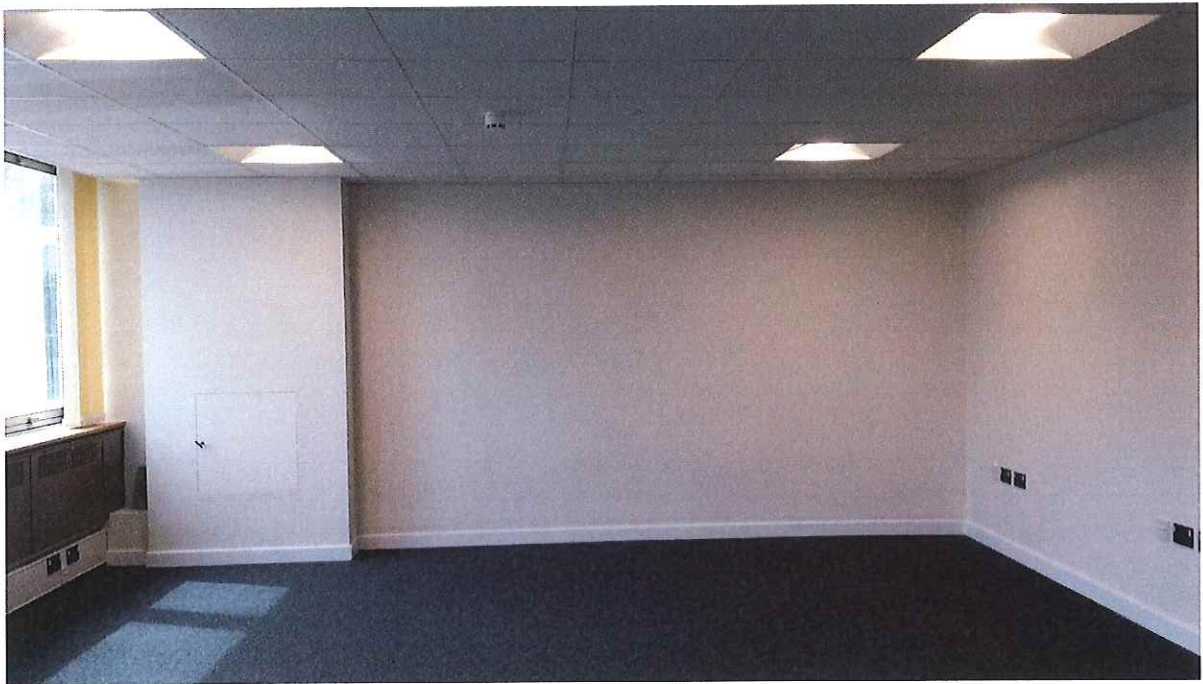
Contact: Stewart Smith, tel: (01233) 330828

Email: stewart.smith@ashford.gov.uk

Appendix 1

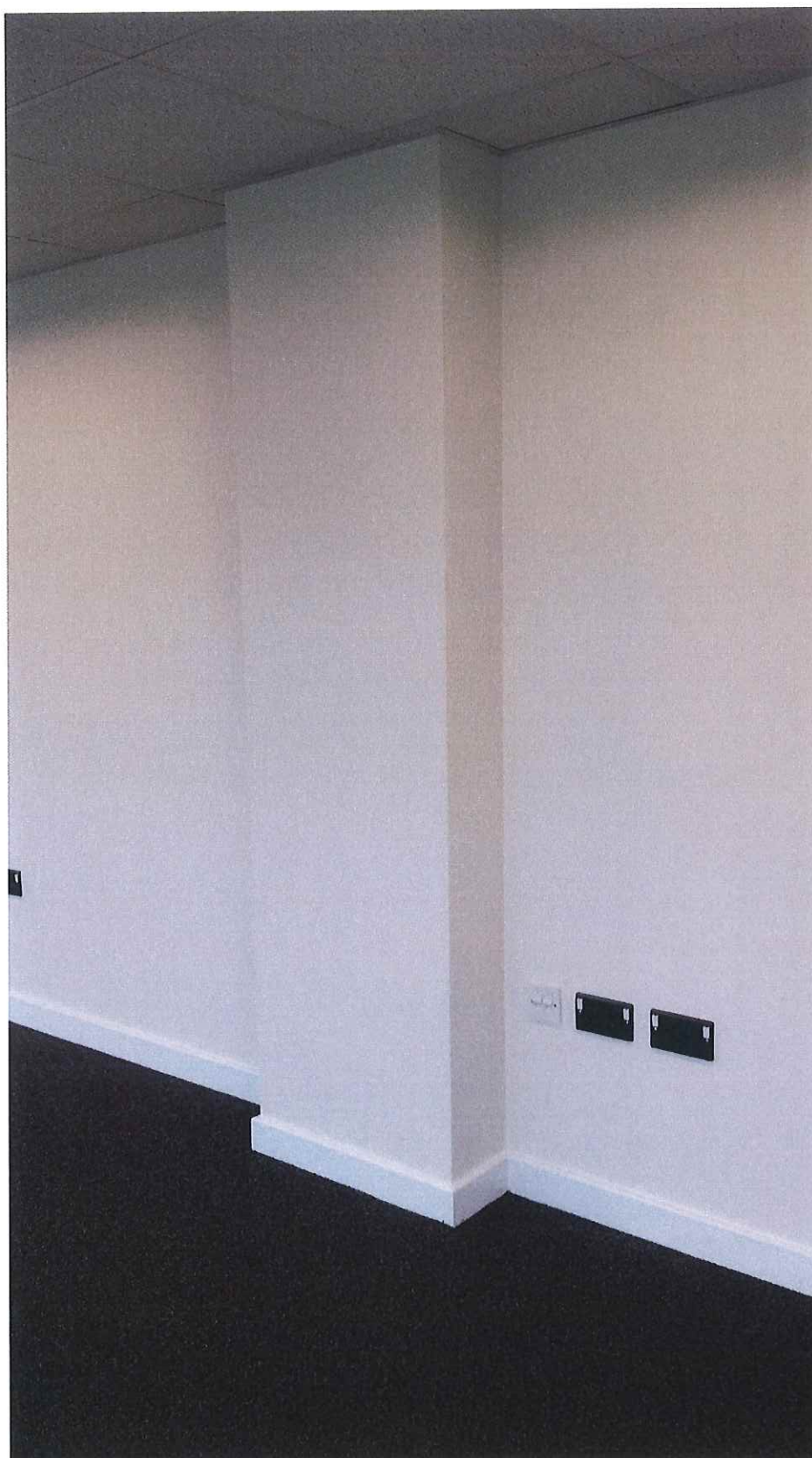


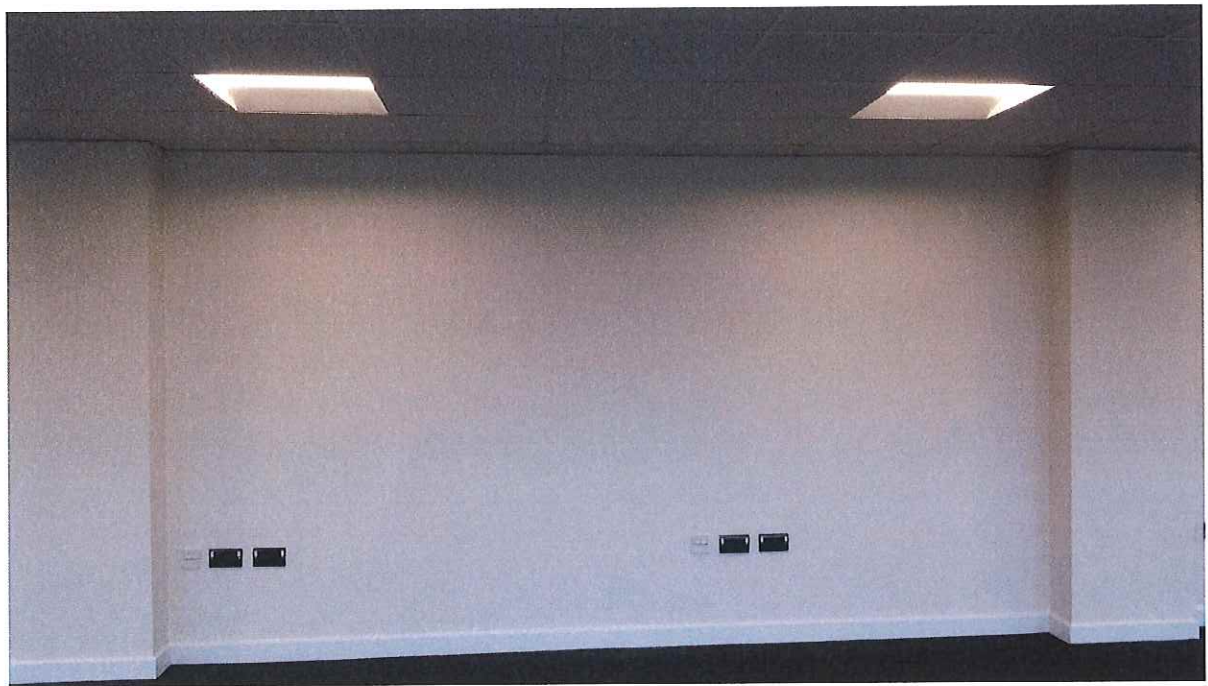














Agenda Item No: 6

Report To **Overview & Scrutiny
(Previously considered by Cabinet)**



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Date: **22 September 2015**

Report Title: **Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4
2014/15 & Quarter 1 2015/16**

Report Author: Policy and Performance Officer, Nicholas Clayton

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Finance, Budget & Resource
Management, Neil Shorter

Summary:

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

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

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is asked to note performance for Quarter 4
of 2014/15 & Quarter 1 2015/16.**

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

Financial Implications: None specifically arising from this report.

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

Impact Assessment N/A

Other Material Implications: N/A

Background Papers: None

Portfolio Holder's Comments

This council's performance generally remains strong. Although the numbers come with some caveats, the fall in those unemployed (claiming Jobseekers Allowance) represents good news for Ashford's economy – alongside a continued steady decrease in the number of young people who have been without work for a long time.

Whilst the numbers needing to be housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation have risen when compared to the end of 2014, with our new provision at Christchurch Road the overall numbers are lower than at the same time last year.

This report's technical annex, alongside the continued monthly monitoring of services and budgets by the council's Management Team, will ensure that this new Administration will maintain the good progress seen in performance over the last few years. We will be agreeing a new corporate plan – and refreshed priorities – covering the next five years in the autumn.

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Ashford Borough Council

Our Performance

April to June 2015

Introduction from the Portfolio Holder

Neil Shorter, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Budget & Resource Management

This council's performance generally remains strong. Although the numbers come with some caveats, the fall in those unemployed (claiming Jobseekers Allowance) represents good news for Ashford's economy – alongside a continued steady decrease in the number of young people who have been without work for a long time.

Whilst the numbers needing to be housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation have risen when compared to the end of 2014, with our new provision at Christchurch Road the overall numbers are lower than at the same time last year.

This report's technical annex, alongside the continued monthly monitoring of services and budgets by the council's Management Team, will ensure that this new Administration will maintain the good progress seen in performance over the last few years. We will be agreeing a new corporate plan – and refreshed priorities – covering the next five years in the autumn.



Helping to create jobs and economic growth

An average of 310,000 people visited the town centre per month during the quarter, as calculated by the footfall counter installed on the high street earlier this year. This is an increase of around 10,000 compared to the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Economic Development Team

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

Source: Compiled by the Parking Services Team

97.1% of food premises comply with environmental health standards. This number has remained steady over the last year. Any food premises found to be non-compliant either receive a formal letter or a revisit, and officers always seek to work with the premises in the first instance. If non-compliance is severe, or does not improve after these initial interventions, officers would then serve a notice. However, during this period no notices were served.

Source: Compiled by the Environmental Health Team

We received 230 applications from householders to develop their homes over the quarter – around 20 less than the previous quarter. Our latest response rates showed that we decided 88% within eight weeks while approving around 93%.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

We received 100 applications from small business and others to develop their properties over the quarter – around 20 less than the previous quarter. Our latest response rates showed that we decided just under 80% within eight weeks while approving around 85%. This represents improved performance compared to previous months.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

The number of residents claiming Job-Seekers Allowance has fallen below 1,000 again, and now stands at around 850¹. This is around 30% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1.1% of Ashford's working age population. Ashford is also below the Kent average, which is currently 1.4%. The number of young people (18-24) claiming JSA long-term (over 12 months) remains steady at 30.

Just over 100 claimants a month either returned to work or increasing their employment hours, whilst the circumstances of around 5 per month meant a switch to another type of benefit.

Source: NOMIS

¹ As part of the Government's reorganisation of the welfare system, Universal Credit (UC) continues to be rolled out across the country, replacing a number of means tested benefits, including Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). UC rollout in Ashford began in April, meaning that JSA figures no longer include those now on UC. As not all UC claimants will be in work, it is probable that JSA claimant numbers now underestimate unemployment. The Office for National Statistics is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to produce an agreed method for separating out unemployed and inactive UC claimants to give a more accurate estimate of local unemployment – due to be updated for local data in early 2017.

Creating quality homes & places to live

March saw the opening of a new permanent canopy for the town centre bandstand, which will allow year-round civic and music events to take place in this town centre focal point.

The average selling price of homes in Ashford (to May) was around 5% more than at the same time last year.

Source: Home.co.uk

The building of 100 new homes was started during quarter 4, an increase of 20 on the previous three months – with the vast majority of these coming from private enterprises. The number of homes completed also remained steady at around 80 over the previous quarter. *(Quarter 1 figures yet to be released by DCLG)*

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government)

100% of council-owned properties had a current gas safety certificate at the end of the quarter, a number comparable with both last quarter's and last year's performance.

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service

In July the Cabinet approved the next phases to create new Section 106-funded community sports and leisure facilities (together with car park improvements) in Kingsnorth and Bridgefield, in partnership with Kingsnorth Parish Council and Kingsnorth Primary School.

Source: Cabinet 09/07/15 minute #68



The average number of families requiring temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation during the quarter fell to just over 10 a month. The number of homeless applications has also fallen to around 40 (with just over half of these being accepted).

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service



Giving residents value for money services

Our Customer Service Agents at the Gateway +, Civic Centre and elsewhere dealt with an average of just over 7,000 visitors per month – around 4,000 less than in the previous quarter. This reflects the period after the busy period at the end of the financial and tax year. Wait times also remained strong, with just under 94% of these face-to-face queries seen within our target of 15 minutes.

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

Source: Compiled by the Customer Services Team

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

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

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

The benefits caseload has fallen to around 9,800 throughout the quarter. This in turn has meant that the average time taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances has levelled-out at around 5 days.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

In July Cabinet approved a new Members IT scheme, which aims to improve the ability of councillors to gain access to council information and work more flexibly – improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the authority's day-to-day operations.

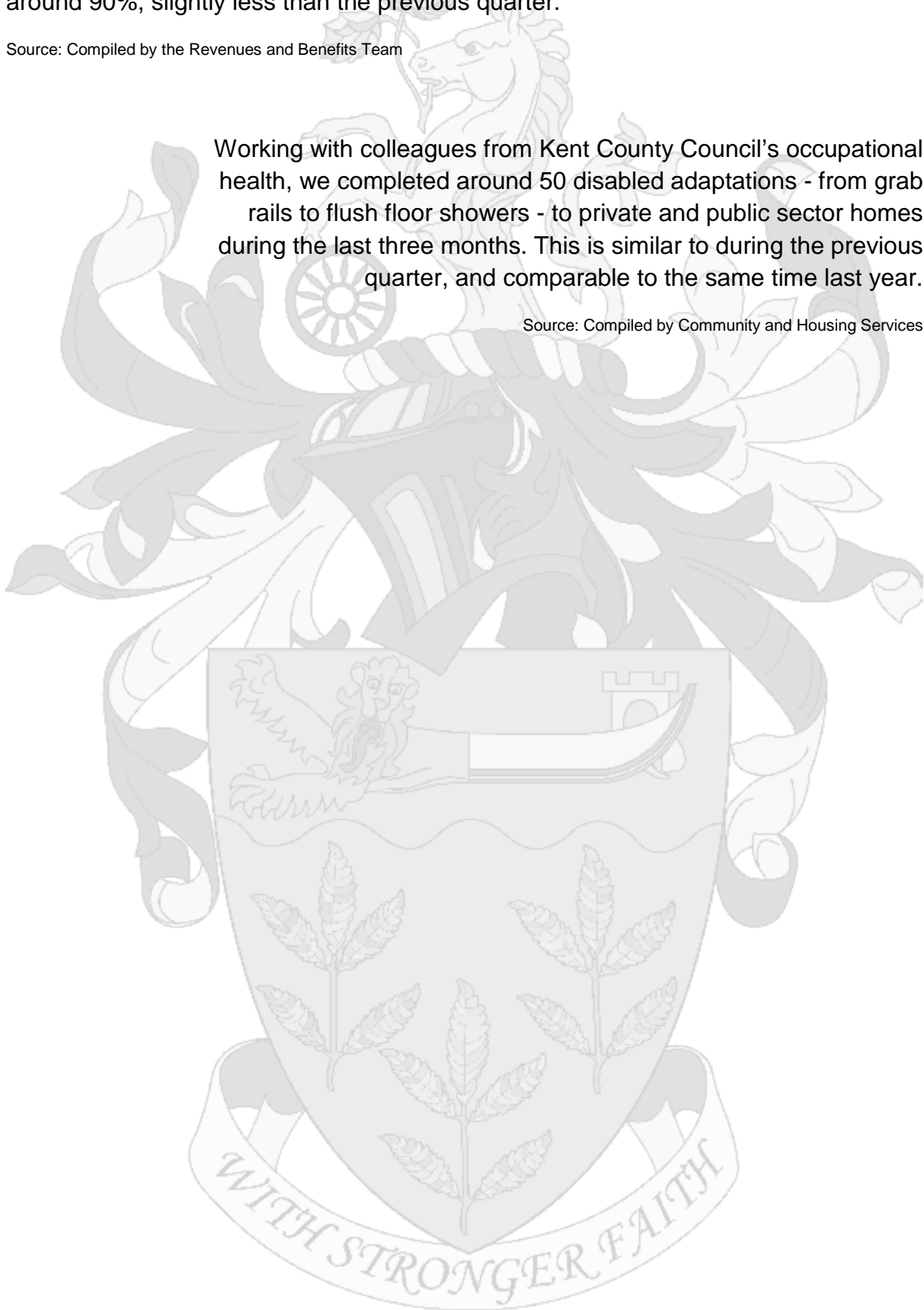
Source: Cabinet 09/07/15 minute #70

The percentage of sundry debtor income received – small payments from residents who don't usually interact with the council (parking fines, pest control services etc) - averaged around 90%, slightly less than the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

Working with colleagues from Kent County Council's occupational health, we completed around 50 disabled adaptations - from grab rails to flush floor showers - to private and public sector homes during the last three months. This is similar to during the previous quarter, and comparable to the same time last year.

Source: Compiled by Community and Housing Services



Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 1 2015/16	Quarter 4 2014/15	Quarter 3 2014/15	Quarter 2 2014/15	Quarter 1 2014/15
Helping to create jobs and economic growth					
Average Town Centre footfall per month	310,000	300,000	282,484	263,500	308,000
Average car park users per month	99,650	98,600	101,000	101,000	97,000
% of compliant food premises	97	98	98	97	97
Householder planning applications - number	234	215	253	270	303
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	88	84	82	86	82
Householder planning applications - % approved	93	98	90	95	95
Small business planning applications - number	97	83	90	110	89
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	80	57	70	69	63
Small business planning applications – % approved	84	79	85	90	88
JSA claimants	850	1,070	980	1,060	1,240
Long-term (over 12 months) JSA claimants 18-24	30	30	35	45	45
Creating quality homes and places to live					
Average house selling price	215,340	217,500	229,000	209,000	213,000
Number of homes started	---	100	80	170	110
Number of homes completed	---	80	80	50	40
% of properties with a current gas safety certificate	100	100	100	100	99.9
Average number of families in B&B accommodation per month	10	14	5	15	14
Number of homeless applications received	38	65	45	60	53
Number of homeless applications approved	23	40	45	35	27
Value for money services					
Average number of face-to-face contacts per month	7,060	11,099	8,253	9,977	11,029
% of customers seen within 15 minutes	94	93	94	93.6	95.1
% of customers using 'self service'	16.7	19.2	17.8	16.7	15.3
% Council Tax collected	30.5	98.5	86.8	58.7	30.6
% Business rates collected	33.2	98.5	86	58.5	31.6
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	67.1	66.7	66.6	67.1	66.9
Benefits Caseload	9,800	9,900	9,860	10,000	10,100
Number of days to process new benefit claims / CoC	5.5	4.8	5.6	5.5	4.8
% sundry debtor income	89	92	94.6	96	79.2
Number of disabled adaptations completed	50	65	68	78	52

Ashford Borough Council

Our Performance

January to March 2015



Helping to create jobs and economic growth

An average of 300,000 people visited the town centre per month during the quarter, as calculated by the footfall counter installed on the high street earlier this year. This is an increase of around 20,000 compared to the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Economic Development Team

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

Source: Compiled by the Parking Services Team

In February the Cabinet agreed to provide bridging finance of £2million for the development of the Ashford International College Campus on Elwick Road. This will enable the release of external funding which will see Phase 1 of the development commence, and will be repayable to the Council upon sale of the College's Jemmett Road site.

Source: Cabinet 011/02/15, minute #344

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

Source: Compiled by the Environmental Health Team

We received 215 applications from householders to develop their homes over the quarter – around 35 less than the previous quarter. Our latest response rates showed that we decided 84% within eight weeks while approving around 98%.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service



We received around 80 applications from small business and others to develop their properties over the quarter – around 10 less than the previous quarter. Our latest response rates showed that we decided just under 60% within eight weeks while approving around 80%. This represents a slight decrease on the previous three months.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

The number of residents claiming Job-Seekers Allowance has risen slightly to 1,070 – although this is still around 25% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1.4% of Ashford's working age population. Ashford is also below the Kent average, which is currently 1.7%. The number of young people (18-24) claiming JSA long-term (over 12 months) has also fallen by 5 to 30.

Around 100 claimants a month either returned to work or increasing their employment hours, whilst the circumstances of around 10 per month meant a switch to another type of benefit.

Source: NOMIS



Creating quality homes & places to live

In March the Cabinet approved the continuation of the Council's New Build Affordable Homes Programme, in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency, for the next five years. This fifth phase of the programme will provide 106 units – including 50 which are proposed for the redevelopment of an existing sheltered housing scheme at Danemore in Tenterden.

Source: Cabinet 12/03/15 minute #399

The average selling price of homes in Ashford was around 9% more than at the same time last year.

Source: Home.co.uk

The building of 80 new homes was started during quarter 3, a decrease of 90 on the previous three months – with the vast majority of these coming from private enterprises. The number of homes completed increased to 80 compared to 50 over the previous quarter. *(Quarter 4 figures yet to be released by DCLG)*

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government)

100% of council-owned properties had a current gas safety certificate at the end of the quarter, a number comparable with both last quarter's and last year's performance.

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service

In March Cabinet approved a project to redevelop the pavilion sited at the Spearpoint Recreation Ground, demolishing the existing run-down building and replacing it with a brand new structure. Section 106 contributions will be used as the Council's contribution – complimented by external funding from the Football Foundation and Sport England.

Source: Cabinet 12/03/15 minute #398

The average number of families in temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation rose slightly during the quarter to just under 15 a month. The number of homeless applications have remained steady at around 60 (with just over half of these being accepted), in line with the trend seen over the previous year.

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service



Giving residents value for money services

Our Customer Service Agents at the Gateway +, Civic Centre and elsewhere dealt with an average of just over 11,000 visitors per month – around 3,000 more than in the previous quarter. This reflects the busier period at the end of the financial and tax year. Wait times have remained strong, with 93% of these face-to-face queries seen within our target of 15 minutes.

The proportion of customers using 'self-service' provision continues to rise to just over 19%, it remains above our target of 10% -meaning that customers didn't need to speak to a member of staff and freeing up officers to deal with more complex queries.

Source: Compiled by the Customer Services Team

By the end of the financial year we had collected 98.5% of council tax and business rates, around the same as for the last year. Around 67% of residents chose to use direct debit for paying council tax, a figure which remains broadly constant compared to last year.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

The benefits caseload has remained steady at around 9,900 throughout the quarter. This in turn has meant that the average time taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances has levelled-out at around 5 and a half days.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

In February the Council set out its Budget for 2015/16 – agreeing to freeze the Borough Council's share of the council tax bill, keeping it the lowest in Kent.

Source: Cabinet 11/02/15 minute #348

The percentage of sundry debtor income received – small payments from residents who don't usually interact with the council (parking fines, pest control services etc) - averaged around 92%, slightly less than the previous quarter.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

Working with colleagues from Kent County Council's occupational health, we completed around 65 disabled adaptations - from grab rails to flush floor showers - to private and public sector homes during the last three months. This is similar to during the previous quarter, and comparable to the same time last year.

Source: Compiled by Community and Housing Services

In March the Cabinet agreed to again increase the Ashford Living Wage Allowance (ALWA) paid to its staff, maintaining it as 'even better' than the National Living Wage. The Cabinet also sought to build on its commitment to support and provide good quality apprenticeships by also agreeing that its apprentices should be paid an Ashford Apprentice Wage Allowance (AAWA) that is the equivalent of 15 pence above the national minimum wage for their age.

Source: Cabinet 12/03/15 minute #397



Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 4 2014/15	Quarter 3 2014/15	Quarter 2 2014/15	Quarter 1 2014/15	Quarter 4 2013/14
Helping to create jobs and economic growth					
Average Town Centre footfall per month	300,000	282,484	263,500	308,000	---
Average car park users per month	98,600	101,000	101,000	97,000	95,000
% of compliant food premises	98	98	97	97	97
Householder planning applications - number	215	253	270	303	265
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	84	82	86	82	80
Householder planning applications - % approved	98	90	95	95	80
Small business planning applications - number	83	90	110	89	72
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	57	70	69	63	50
Small business planning applications – % approved	79	85	90	88	80
JSA claimants	1,070	980	1,060	1,240	1,450
Long-term (over 12 months) JSA claimants 18-24	30	35	45	45	60
Creating quality homes and places to live					
Average house selling price	217,500	229,000	209,000	213,000	207,000
Number of homes started	---	80	170	110	90
Number of homes completed	---	80	50	40	20
% of properties with a current gas safety certificate	100	100	100	99.9	100
Average number of families in B&B accommodation per month	14	5	15	14	19
Number of homeless applications received	65	45	60	53	84
Number of homeless applications approved	40	45	35	27	40
Value for money services					
Average number of face-to-face contacts per month	11,099	8,253	9,977	11,029	13,048
% of customers seen within 15 minutes	93	94	93.6	95.1	94.1
% of customers using 'self service'	19.2	17.8	16.7	15.3	11.8
% Council Tax collected	98.5	86.8	58.7	30.6	98.3
% Business rates collected	98.5	86	58.5	31.6	98.9
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	66.7	66.6	67.1	66.9	66.2
Benefits Caseload	9,900	9,860	10,000	10,100	10,100
Number of days to process new benefit claims / CoC	4.8	5.6	5.5	4.8	5.8
% sundry debtor income	92	94.6	96	79.2	87.9
Number of disabled adaptations completed	65	68	78	52	44

22 September 2015

Future Reviews and Report Tracker

1. The current Year Plan for 2015/16 and the report tracker is attached to this report.
2. Reports on Emergency Planning (following the incident in South Ashford in June) and International House are included within the agenda for this meeting.
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 Vice Chairman of the Committee has suggested two items the committee may wish to review. They are Freedom of Information Decisions – Withholding information from requests received and the Effectiveness of the Whistle Blowing Policy. The Committee is asked to consider these two suggestions.
7. 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.**

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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	No Meeting	
September	ABC Business Plan Performance Report International House – report on full years trading Emergency Planning	
October	3 Year Review of Mayoralty Disabled Adaptions The Chief Executive – A more strategic approach to scrutiny.	
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 2016	Report will be on the agenda for the July 2016 meeting.	

301/12/14	Disabled Adaptations	Head of Communities and Housing	October 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	
87/07/15	Quality Bus Partnership	Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety	July 2016	Update report one year on from report considered in July 2015	
88/07/15	Public Services(Social Value Act) 2012	Head of Communities and Housing	July 2016	Update report one year on from report considered in July 2015	
45/06/15	Emergency Planning Update	Resilience Partnership Manager	September 2015	Information on response to the emergency in South Ashford in June 2015.	