

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.

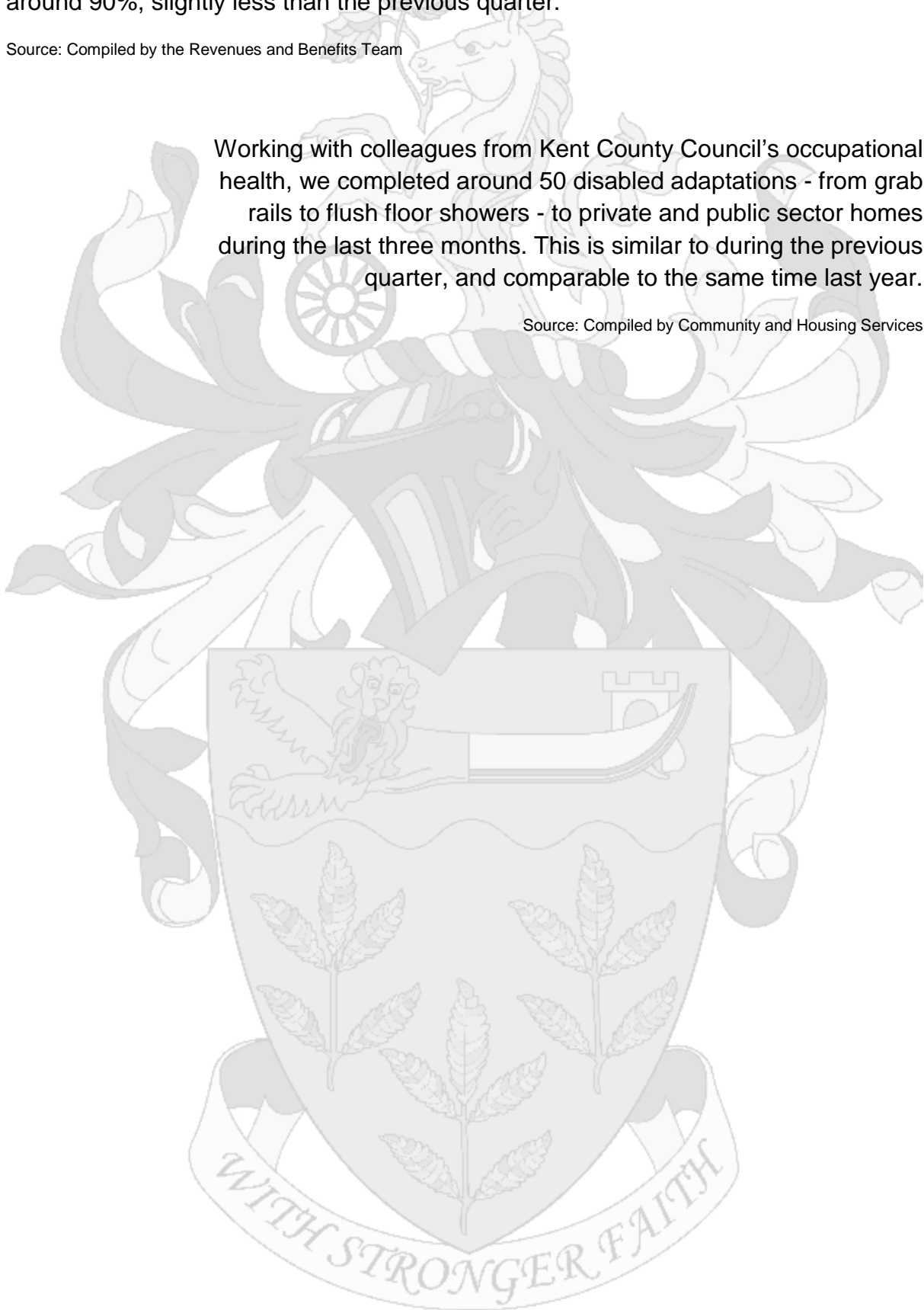
Source: Cabinet 09/07/15 minute #70

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