

Agenda Item No: 5
Report To **Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **23 February 2016**



Report Title: **Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3 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 council's work.

The report also includes a 'Technical Annex' of all numerical information included within the report which provides comparison and trend data against performance over the previous four quarters.

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is asked to note performance for Quarter 3 2015/16.**

Policy Overview: Previously, the council's strategic direction, which informs the report's content, was held within "Focus 2013-15", the council's corporate plan.

In December the council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement". This will therefore be the last quarterly performance report compiled against the previous corporate priorities, and all future reports will consider performance against this new corporate plan and refreshed priority areas.

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

Overall, the last three months has seen some additional progress on a number of the council's key priorities – including a continued improvement in the borough's recycling rate and approval of significant development along Elwick Road.

Service performance remains steady, and following action in the previous quarter to review and amended our approach to dealing with face to face enquiries, this change continues to lead to improvements in the service offered at our Gateways. The speed at which Officers deal with other transactions – from planning applications to benefit claims – remain on target, whilst there has been continued falls in unemployment figures.

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Ashford Borough Council

Our Performance

October to December 2015

Introduction from the Portfolio Holder

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

Overall, the last three months has seen some additional progress on a number of the council's key priorities – including a continued improvement in the borough's recycling rate and approval of significant development along Elwick Road.

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Helping to create jobs and economic growth

An average of 282,000 people visited the town centre per month during the quarter, as calculated by the footfall counter installed on the high street last year. This is a decrease of around 30,000 compared to the previous quarter. A spike in September brought up the average for the previous three months, whilst this quarter's result is consistent with the numbers seen at the same time last year.

Source: Compiled by the Economic Development Team

An average of just under 105,000 people per month used the council's car parks in the three months to November. This is a slight increase on the previous quarter and an increase of around 5,000 compared to the same time last year.

Source: Compiled by the Parking Services Team

In December the Planning Committee approved an application to develop land along Elwick Road from the leading UK developer Stanhope. Representing in excess of £75 million of private investment into Ashford, the plans include –

- A multi-screen Cinema
- A hotel to support the borough's growing tourist economy
- Restaurant space
- Homes, including private apartments and rental properties
- Attractive public space and landscaping

Source: Planning Committee 16/12/2015, Application number [15/01195/AS](#)

The council received 230 applications from householders to develop their homes over the quarter – around 10 more than the previous quarter. The latest response rates showed that the council decided 95% within eight weeks while approving 97%.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

The council received around 90 applications from small business and others to develop their properties over the quarter – around 10 more than the previous quarter. The latest response rates showed that the council decided 88% within eight weeks while approving around 85%. This represents stable performance compared to previous months.

Source: Compiled by the Planning and Development Service

The number of residents claiming Job-Seekers Allowance continued to fall slightly, and now stands at just above 775¹. This is around 20% less than at the same time last year and constitutes around 1% of Ashford's working age population. Ashford is below the Kent average, currently at 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

In October Ashford returned to the UK's large-scale property trade show MPIPIM UK. Ashford's stand, hosted by the council in partnership with local business providers, provided an excellent platform to promote the borough to a wider audience.

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

The average selling price of homes in Ashford (to October) was just over £230,000 - around 7% more than at the same time last year.

Source: Home.co.uk

The building of 80 new homes was started during Quarter 2, a decrease of 40 on the previous three months – with the vast majority of these coming from private enterprises. The number of homes completed increased by around 50 to 130. (*Quarter 3 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 October the Cabinet endorsed a new Quality Monitoring approach, which seeks to drive up the standards of new homes built, the places they are part of and the environment around them.

Source: Cabinet 08/10/15 minute 162

The average number of families requiring temporary Bed and Breakfast accommodation during the last three months (to October) rose slightly to around 18 a month. During quarter 2 the number of homeless applications also rose slightly to around 55 per quarter - with just over half of these being accepted. (*Quarter 3 figures yet to be available*)

Source: Compiled by the Community and Housing Service

In December DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford is now in the top 10% recycling councils in the country. During 2014/15 the borough was the best in Kent at producing the least waste per household, and also remained the second most improved recycler across the country.

In October the Cabinet received the most recent review of homelessness, alongside a draft homelessness strategy, ahead of a 12 week consultation exercise.

Source: Cabinet 08/10/15 minute 166

In November the Cabinet granted additional funding towards the replacement of Kennington's Spearpoint Pavilion. The additional money will enable the council to invest in a new high quality sports facility providing modern facilities including a new kitchen and eight male and female changing rooms.

Source: Cabinet 12/11/15 minute 201

Working with colleagues from Kent County Council's occupational health, the council completed around 75 disabled adaptations - from grab rails to flush floor showers - to private and public sector homes during the last three months. This is slightly higher than during the previous quarter, and higher than the same time last year.

Source: Compiled by Community and Housing Services



Giving residents value for money services

The council's Customer Service Agents at the Gateway +, Civic Centre and elsewhere dealt with an average of just over 6,000 visitors per month – around 100 less than in the previous quarter. A fully appointment-only service now runs five days a week, a change which is working really well – with the need for face to face appointments reducing and the numbers using our 'fast track' service increasing. This has meant that overall wait times have also improved, with around 95% of face-to-face queries seen within our target of 15 minutes, whilst the average wait time for those using fast track was just over 5 minutes, a slight improvement from last quarter.

The proportion of customers using 'self-service' provision is increasing slightly to average 21% each month, 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 December the council had collected around 85% 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 9,650 throughout the quarter. This in turn has meant that the average time taken to process new claims and changes in circumstances remains around 6 days - under the target of 8 days.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

In December the Audit Committee received the external auditor's annual audit letter, which confirmed that during the previous year

the council had proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Source: Audit Committee 01/12/15 minutes 221 and 222

The percentage of sundry debtor income received on time – small payments from residents who don't usually interact with the council (parking fines, pest control services etc) - averaged around 80%, slightly less than the previous quarter. If not paid within the prescribed 14 days, all statutory methods of enforcement of debts are available for the council to use.

Source: Compiled by the Revenues and Benefits Team

96.8% of food premises comply with environmental health standards. While the percentage has remained steady over the last year, the council has maintained its effort in this area with a continued focus and resources.

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. Indeed, in November and December officers served enforcement notices on two businesses meaning that they require urgent improvement to meet health standards.

Source: Compiled by the Environmental Health Team

In December the Cabinet agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*". This sets out what the council aims to achieve in the following priority areas –

- *Enterprising Ashford* – economic growth & investment
- *Living Ashford* – quality housing and homes for all
- *Active & Creative Ashford* – healthy choices through physical, cultural & leisure engagement
- *Attractive Ashford* – countryside & townscape, tourism & heritage

Source: Cabinet 03/12/15 minute 238

Technical Annex

Indicator	Quarter 3 2015/16	Quarter 2 2015/16	Quarter 1 2015/16	Quarter 4 2014/15	Quarter 3 2014/15
Helping to create jobs and economic growth					
Average Town Centre footfall per month	282,000	316,600	310,000	300,000	282,484
Average car park users per month	104,000	101,950	99,650	98,600	101,000
Householder planning applications - number	230	218	234	215	253
Householder planning applications - % decided within 8 weeks	95	92	88	84	82
Householder planning applications - % approved	97	93	93	98	90
Small business planning applications - number	90	82	97	83	90
Small business planning applications – % decided within 8 weeks	88	80	80	57	70
Small business planning applications – % approved	87	84	84	79	85
JSA claimants	775	790	850	1,070	980
Long-term (over 12 months) JSA claimants 18-24	30	30	30	30	35
Creating quality homes and places to live					
Average house selling price	230,919	226,827	215,340	217,500	229,000
Number of homes started	---	80	120	100	80
Number of homes completed	---	150	80	80	80
% of properties with a current gas safety certificate	100	100	100	100	100
Average number of families in B&B accommodation per month	18	15	10	14	5
Number of homeless applications received	---	56	38	65	45
Number of homeless applications approved	---	42	23	40	45
Value for money services					
Average number of face-to-face contacts per month	6,130	7,110	7,060	11,099	8,253
% of customers seen within 15 minutes	95	99	94	93	94
% of customers using 'self service'	21	20	16.7	19.2	17.8
% Council Tax collected	86.7	58.5	30.5	98.5	86.8
% Business rates collected	84.1	60.2	33.2	98.5	86
% take up of direct debit for paying council tax	66.6	67.1	67.1	66.7	66.6
Benefits Caseload	9,650	9,700	9,800	9,900	9,860
Number of days to process new benefit claims / CoC	6.5	5.75	5.5	4.8	5.6
% sundry debtor income	81	84	89	92	94.6
Number of disabled adaptations completed	75	65	50	65	68
% of compliant food premises	97	97	97	98	98