



## 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 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016 at 7.00pm.

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The Members of this Committee are:-

Cllr Chilton (Chairman)

Cllr Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Feacey, Hicks, A. Howard, W. Howard, Krause, Link, Mrs. Martin, Sims,  
Conservative Vacancy.

### Agenda

- |   | <b>Page<br/>Nos.</b> |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. <b>Apologies/Substitutes</b> – To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii)                             |                      |
| 2. <b>Declarations of Interest:-</b> 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. <b>Minutes</b> – to approve the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 26 <sup>th</sup> July 2016.                             |                      |

### **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**

- |    |  |         |
|----|--|---------|
| 4. | Quarter 1 2016/17 Performance Report       | 1 - 24  |
| 5. | Raising the Profile of O&S Report          | 25 - 44 |
| 6. | Budget Scrutiny Task Group – Verbal update |         |

### **Part IV – Information/Monitoring Items**

- |    |                                   |         |
|----|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 7. | Future Reviews and Report Tracker | 45 - 46 |
| 8. | Topic Selection Flowchart         | 47- 48  |

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Telephone: 01233 330499 Email: [clare.ricketts@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:clare.ricketts@ashford.gov.uk)  
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**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](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 Corporate Director (Law and Governance) and Monitoring Officer or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democratic Services as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **26<sup>th</sup> July 2016**.

### Present:

Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Feacey, Hicks, Krause, Link, Sims.

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

### Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Burgess, Mrs Martin

### Also Present:

Cllrs. Clokie, Shorter, White

Head of Housing, Housing Strategy Manager, Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer, Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

## 98 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as a Member of the Ashford Volunteer Centre	100
Sims	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as Director of the Ashford Volunteer Centre	100

## 99 Minutes

### Resolved:

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## 100 Housing Framework Annual Report

The Housing Strategy Manager introduced the report and explained that it provided an annual update on achievements during 2015/2016 against the actions set out in

the Housing Framework 2013-2018. The report outlined a review of the Housing Frameworks priorities to respond to national and local challenges and aspirations. The Vice-Chairman in the Chair opened up the report to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- A Member asked what type of properties the 10 homes were that the Property Company had acquired. The Housing Manager explained that the lead officers dealing with the purchasing worked within the Property Department but she had been informed that they were mainly 2/3 bed houses. These properties would be let on the open market and did not fall under the social housing remit.
- A query was raised asking who people would direct enquiries to regarding affordable housing and shared ownership. The Housing Strategy Manager advised that access to information was available via a Help to Buy Agent or BPHA (a major housing association and socially-motivated property business).
- A Member asked if there was any intention to increase the capacity of temporary accommodation to alleviate the financial burden of placing people into bed & breakfast accommodation. The Housing Manager responded that they were continually looking into purchasing a suitable property, similar to that of Christchurch House. A property had recently been pursued and initial communications made, but unfortunately the transaction was unsuccessful.
- The Housing Manager talked to the Committee about the recent work undertaken with Porchlight around homelessness in the borough. The Council funded Porchlight to provide a rough sleeping outreach worker in the Ashford area. A working group had been formed which included street pastors, police officers and ABC to assist rough sleepers in accessing self-help services. A Member asked whether the figure of 89 stated in the report for the number of homeless applicants on the housing register related to people on the streets. The Housing Manager advised that the figure related to people who had been accepted as homeless and were in temporary housing such as Christchurch House or ABC private sector leased properties or in B&B awaiting permanent accommodation. It was estimated that the number of people sleeping rough in the Borough at any one time was between 1 and 5 people. She explained that although guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) required that an annual rough sleeping estimate was provided, ABC in conjunction with Porchlight monitored and acted on rough sleeping cases more frequently on a weekly basis throughout the year.
- A Member asked who assessed applicants for disabled adaptations and the Housing Manager confirmed that in all cases Housing Officers liaised formally with Occupational Therapists who undertook the assessment. A suggestion was made that ABC could work with Ashford Volunteer Centre and the Housing Manager agreed this was a good idea. A question was asked why the amount spent on private adaptations was higher than for ABC tenants. The Housing Strategy Manager explained that ABC housing was maintained to a high standard and lots of properties were already well equipped so a higher proportion of minor adaptations may be required. Private sector

properties often required major work that was likely to increase costs. The Portfolio Holder added that the HRA was legally not able to pay for private adaptations.

- A Member asked what procedures were in place for long term empty properties. The Housing Manager explained that there was no funding available for ABC to assist with funding to repair empty properties but officers investigated cases reported to them and offered advice on the options available. These included either working with the KCC No Use Empty Campaign to access a KCC loan to enable a property to be brought back into use or where the property was in good condition, the Housing Team could offer to take over the management of the property and let it on behalf of the landlord. In addition in certain cases the Council could apply to the Residential Tribunal for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO). If such an order was granted by the tribunal the local authority could arrange to repair and tenant the property and recoup the costs via collection of rental income. However nationally these orders were few and far between, and notoriously difficult to obtain.
- The Housing Strategy Manager talked to the Group about fuel poverty and explained that the Housing Department were investing in a modelling tool provided via the British Research Establishment (BRE) to identify a range of private sector information including properties that had low energy efficiency. The Housing Manager added that they held regular private landlord events and promoted energy efficiency via these events. In addition, Housing ran an accreditation scheme for private landlords and had a very small budget to encourage private landlords to undertake energy efficiency improvements for accredited properties.

**Resolved: That**

- i) the report be received and noted**
- ii) the report be approved for publication on the Council's website**

## **101 Ashford Borough Council's Performance Dashboard**

The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer introduced the presentation and explained that an online system had been developed which offered users a more in-depth and interactive way of viewing performance data and statistics. This insight would always be available to view, but the system could also produce paper reports for committee. A demonstration of the Dashboard was then presented to the Committee.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair opened up the item to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- A Member asked if the data would be publically available and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer advised that whilst the information

could be made publically available in the future, it had been agreed that its initial use would be as an internal management tool.

- The Vice-Chairman asked how data would be managed and checked, and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer confirmed that whilst “Super-users” would govern the data, the system was able to flag up any information that may have been inputted incorrectly.
- Members asked if a quarterly report would still be made to the Committee and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer confirmed it would be, but it was worth noting that the advantage of the Dashboard was that data could be viewed on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

## **102 Budget Scrutiny Task Group Report**

It was the responsibility of the O&S Committee to agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group which would scrutinise the Council’s draft 2017/2018 budget and report its findings to the O&S Committee and then report to Cabinet on the soundness of the budget. The Vice-Chairman explained that it did require a commitment of time and asked for volunteers. A Member explained that the Task Group was not so much about number crunching but more about identifying whether what was being proposed was deliverable. The Vice-Chairman volunteered himself and would speak to the Chairman about inviting other Members. Several Members advised that they would check their diaries and come back with an answer. A suggestion was made that a briefing session be arranged.

### **Resolved:**

- (i) that the O&S Committee agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group.**
- (ii) that Members feedback to the Chairman and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer their availability**
- (iii) a briefing session be arranged for Members before the start of the budget scrutiny process**

## **103 Implementation of Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 Report**

The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer introduced the item and explained that the Cabinet Office were imminently expected to produce extra guidance to Local Authorities regarding what was expected in relation to the Public Services (Social Value) Act. Depending on the content of this guidance, the Procurement Officer may attend a future Overview & Scrutiny meeting.

The Vice-Chairman opened up the item to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- The Committee discussed what the Public Services (Social Value) Act meant and how it was primarily about adding value to the community when procuring Public Service contracts, but it was also good practice to consider Social Value for all procurement activity.
- A Member mentioned that some Officers seemed unaware of the Act and asked whether it had been implemented at ABC and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer explained that further information had been provided, but perhaps had yet to filter down to Officers on a wider scale.
- The Portfolio Holder spoke about the new Resource Manager that had been in post since January and the Project Implementation Document that she had produced to assist the Procurement Officer in adding value.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted**

## **104 Future Reviews and Report Tracker**

The Vice-Chairman discussed various items on the Report Tracker and opened up the items to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- The Committee agreed they were happy to receive the Disaster Recovery Report circulated via email by the Scrutiny and Overview Officer.
- A Member asked for a Feasibility Study to be undertaken on the impact of removing the wastewater facility in the town. Members discussed the issue of Ashford being a growth area and having responsibility for the infrastructure to support growth. The Water companies had reported capacity to 2025 so it was important to ascertain what plans were in place for after that time. The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer explained that a report was being drafted regarding this issue and would be circulated to Members shortly.
- The Vice-Chairman discussed public engagement and the need to publicise what the O&S Committee did. If external agencies such as Southern Water and the NHS were to be invited to O&S, then this would undoubtedly encourage residents to attend meetings. The Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Officer would take this forward.
- A topic for future scrutiny was 5 Year Land Supply and a Member reported that the Leader had mentioned at the last Planning meeting that he would be writing to DCLG for clarification on what to do when developers bought land

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but did not build on it, as has happened in Ashford.

- The Committee agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled for August.

**Resolved:**

- (i) that the tracker be noted**
- (ii) the meeting in August be cancelled**

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**Agenda Item No:**

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date:** 08/09/2016

**Report Title:** Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1 2016/17

**Report Author:** Nicholas Clayton, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

**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 against its Corporate Plan during Quarter 1 2016/17. This includes information on what the Cabinet has achieved through its decision-making, key performance data, and consideration of the wider borough picture which impacts upon the Council's work.

The organisation's approach to the monitoring of its performance against this plan has been revised. Accordingly, attached are summary highlights from the new online Performance 'Dashboard' for each of the Council's Corporate Plan areas.

**Key Decision:** NO

**Affected Wards:** N/A

**Recommendations:** **The Cabinet be asked to:-**

- 1. Note the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan in Quarter 1 of 2016/17.**

**Policy Overview:** In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*".

This also provided an opportunity to refresh the way in which performance against this new Corporate Plan (and its priority areas) was measured, presented and engaged with by officers and members.

**Financial Implications:** N/A

**Risk Assessment** N/A

**Equalities Impact  
Assessment** N/A

**Contacts:** Nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 330208)

## **Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 1 2016/17**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 1 2016/17.
2. This report provides a summary of the main developments affecting performance during the quarter, whilst the attached highlight summaries provide key trend data underlying this.

### **Background**

3. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees receive an update on how the Council is achieving its objectives.
4. Historically, this has been in the form of a short, paper-based report which could only provide a snapshot of how the Council was doing at a fixed point in time.
5. In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*".
6. This also provided an opportunity to refresh the way in which performance against this new Corporate Plan (and its priority areas) was monitored, presented and engaged with by officers and members.
7. Whilst this approach is naturally an evolving one, the aim is for this Performance Dashboard (the Dashboard) to inform the work of both officers and members, providing an ongoing tool which facilitates insight and understanding across the organisation on the state of progress against our goals.
8. As part of the Council's wider governance arrangements, such performance information is used to reflect on the organisation's approach – leading to doing things differently where needed in order to offer efficient services and effective outcomes.

### **Recent Developments of the Dashboard**

9. Over the last year the Policy and Performance team have worked with a leading open data and visualisation company to design a Performance Dashboard, held workshops with performance leads within services to see what information the Council collects and what should or could be collected; gathered contextual data from KCC and other partners; and kept senior managers apprised of developments.

10. Following the Quarter 4 2015/16 performance update, Management Team asked that Heads of Service and their teams provide final feedback and thoughts on the Dashboard. Accordingly, the Dashboard was recirculated to Management Team, alongside a series of presentations and meetings with service heads and/or the wider service units.
11. Through this round of engagement, a wide range of suggestions was made, including additional datasets and amendments to the overall look and presentation. Other major changes are summarised below –
  - a. To ensure transparency and allow for further feedback, any information drawn from an external partner (most often KCC but also government departments and other online performance systems) now have a live link to the source alongside the chart.
  - b. Contextual data (often drawn from external partners) is now placed in a separate section alongside the narrative against each performance goal. This will ensure that those interventions and outcomes more directly relating to the Council's efforts against the Corporate Plan will be more distinct.
  - c. Further integration of content to align with other regular performance reporting, for example that provided by Housing Services. A live link has also been set up to these quarterly updates themselves.
  - d. Signposting users to other sections of the Dashboard where additional relevant performance data can be found.
  - e. The highlight summary reports, presented below and drawn directly from the Dashboard system, have been cut-down and reshaped to include the key trend graphs and analysis – in line with the 'Technical Annex' Members and the public have previously received. These provide a fraction of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site management tool.
12. It should also be noted that this is the first version of the Dashboard, with an emphasis on making sure the core data, components and insight begin to work as a management tool. As such, analysis is constantly being added as the latest data is added to the system and interventions are made. Alongside an ongoing user group which will meet regularly over the next year, feedback from more regular use of the site, and further integration of service planning and programme management data – as this comes on stream before the end of the year – will provide further developments (and a deepening) of the overall performance picture.

### **Summary of Performance Developments in Quarter 1 2016/17**

13. The majority of performance goals the council is working towards remain either on-target or near-target.
14. Quarter 1 saw activity on a variety of initiatives which will have a positive impact on the outcomes set out in the Council's corporate plan –
  - a. In June Ashford was accepted onto the third year of the national Business in the Community's Healthy High Streets programme. The programme aims to provide intensive corporate support to 100 High

Streets, connecting corporate businesses with established Town Teams to support town centre regeneration and growth.

- b. In light of a challenging position for future growth, in June the Council launched the draft Local Plan for eight weeks of consultation (now closed). The Local Plan sets out the land needed to provide new homes and jobs up to the year 2030. It also addresses retail, leisure transport, community infrastructure and environmental issues.
- c. Following work by the new Policy and Compliance Taskgroup, in June Cabinet agreed a suite of revised Housing enforcement policies, updating the council's approach in the following areas -
  - Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Prosecution Policy
  - Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for Ashford Borough Housing Tenants
  - Housing Income and Arrears Management Policy
- d. The Planning Committee received and decided upon 13 applications including -
  - Approved up to 157,616 square metres of employment led mixed use business space in Sevington
  - Approved 640 dwellings at the former Powergen site in Ashford
- e. July saw Create celebrate its 21st birthday, with around 12,000 people enjoying the various activities available throughout the day -
  - 78% were regular attendees and 22% were new to the event
  - £149,000 estimated spend in the local economy by Create attendees on associated travel, accommodation, food and drink
  - 67,000 people viewed Create's online video campaigns leading up to the event, with the Official Create 2016 film being viewed by over 4,000 people in just 48 hours
  - A large social media presence, with 46,000 tweets about Create in and around the day itself
- f. In June the Council launched a new Ashford Heritage Trail, and handy leaflet, which takes visitors on a journey through history to discover heritage sites around the town centre. The Council has also produced a Museum and Heritage Trail, which introduces visitors to sites further-afield across the borough.
- g. In June the council learnt of its successful application to Historic England to upgrade the listed building status of the Hubert Fountain. This means it has now been listed at Grade II\*, which is significant as this status has been given to only 5.5% of listed buildings in the country.
- h. In May the Cabinet gave its support to the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre (AIMREC), and agreed to provide a mortgage loan to help the scheme's supporters to purchase the necessary land, owned by Kier, to enable the company to apply for significant funding from various sources including a capital grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- i. In July Cabinet considered a review of T-CAT, and agreed a set of further improvements to the service.
- j. In June the council launched a consultation concerning proposals for a revised council tax support scheme in Ashford. Pensioners remain unaffected by the proposed changes to the scheme and the council has already decided that as disabled claimants of council tax support

will continue to receive additional support (5%). However, residents of working-age will be asked to contribute a little more towards their council tax. Those directly affected were posted hard copies of the documentation and questionnaire.

15. As noted above, the information included within this report provides merely a high-level snapshot of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site management tool. Whilst the Corporate Plan runs to the end of the decade, the initiatives noted above are intended to provide long-term positive outcomes on the trend analysis the Council undertakes.
16. The majority of the trends captured within these summaries have remained broadly steady over the last quarter. Unemployment, under the revised ONS methodology, remains steady (or slightly increasing) for all claimants and young people, whilst the numbers needing temporary accommodation also remains constant compared to the previous year. Planning response times have improved whilst dealing with a relatively steady level of applications, and recycling rates have levelled off as expected following the large increases over the last few years.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

17. N/A

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

18. Overall, Ashford Borough Council's performance remains strong, and I am reassured by the volume of activity and initiatives the organisation continues to champion in order to make our corporate plan a reality and see real impact across the borough by the end of this decade. In particular, I am pleased to see that our efforts to support our high street and local businesses, through initiatives like TCAT and the purchase of Park Mall, are already supporting a fall in the overall vacancy rate across the town centre. Whilst unemployment is low compared to Kent, it has levelled off recently – the launch of Ashford's new College campus in a year's time will provide additional impetus to create new, sustainable local employment and skills.
19. I am pleased to see that the council's new Performance Dashboard is now available to share with Members and senior management. The wealth of information it includes, accessed simply in an online format, will help immeasurably in informing the work and success of our corporate plan and initiatives. The highlight summaries included in this report present merely a top line snapshot of our performance, and I would urge all colleagues to take the opportunity of consulting with the online Dashboard itself for further context, analysis and data.

**Contact:** Nicholas Clayton, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

**Email:** [Nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk)



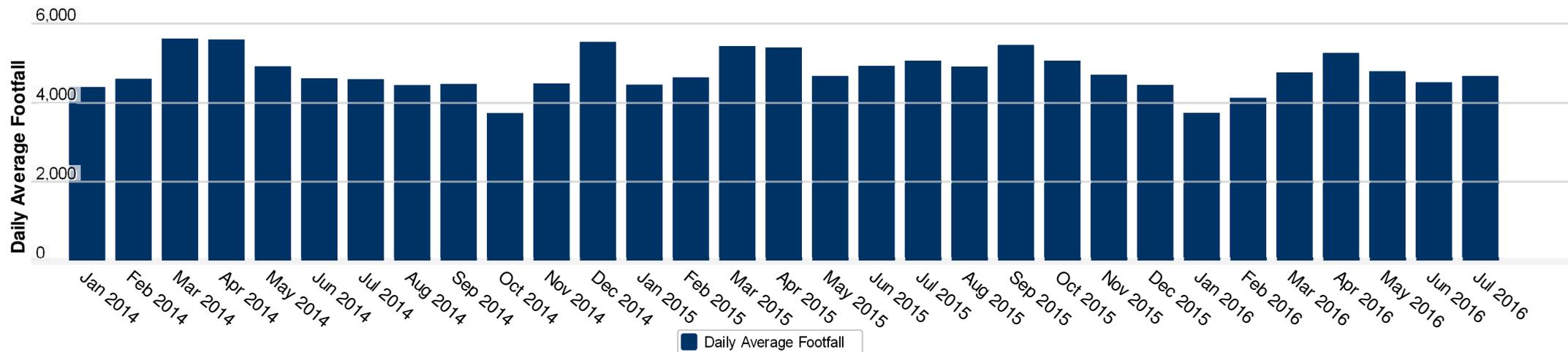
# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Enterprising Ashford

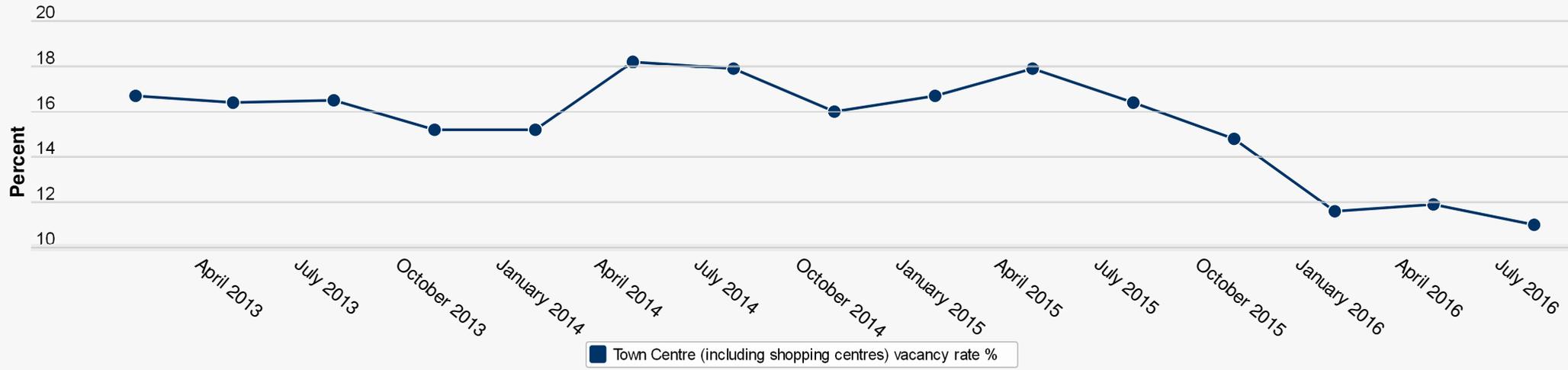
### Town Centre Footfall

A small counting device is mounted on opposite WHSmith, a zone around this to be targeted has been defined, and pedestrians and cars who travel through the zone are recorded. Visitor numbers are recorded using the very latest counting software based on 'Target Specific Tracking' (TST). TST software monitors flows by employing a wide range of characteristics to determine a target to identify and track.



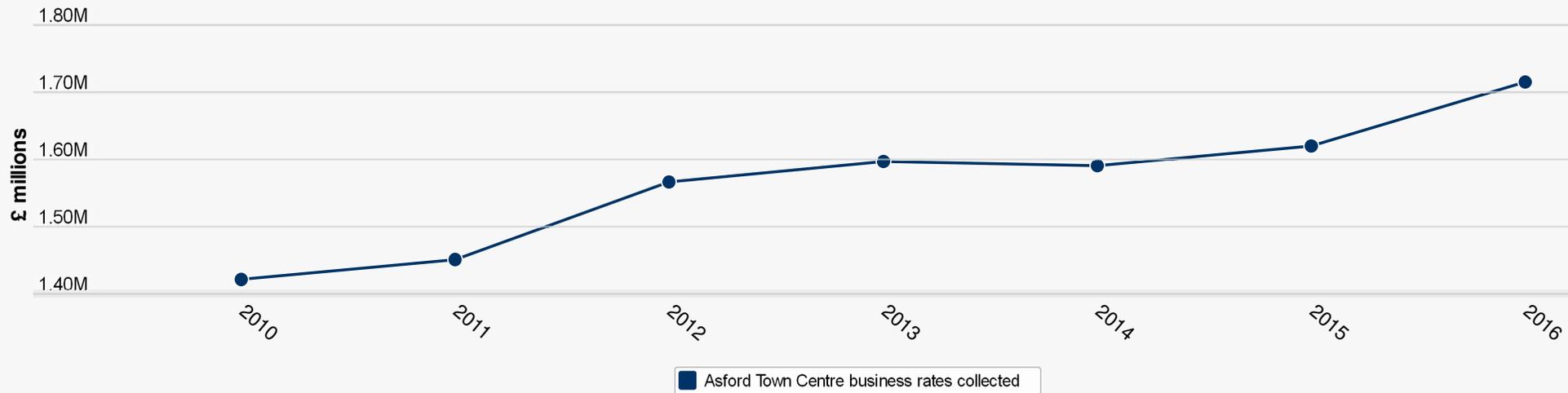
Whilst footfall fell during the end of the previous year, this has been attributed partly to the poor and unsettled weather during and after the christmas period. However, the state of Ashford town centre remains generally strong, with footfall during 2015 bucking the national trend and increasing by around **5%** against to the year before, compared to a national trend of a **1.6%** decrease. The number of visitors parking has increased slightly, in some part due to the free parking initiative.

## Ashford Town Centre Vacancy Rates



Vacancy rates have fallen across the town centre overall over the last year. Park Mall's historically higher rates have also begun to fall since the Council took over direct operations in 2015.

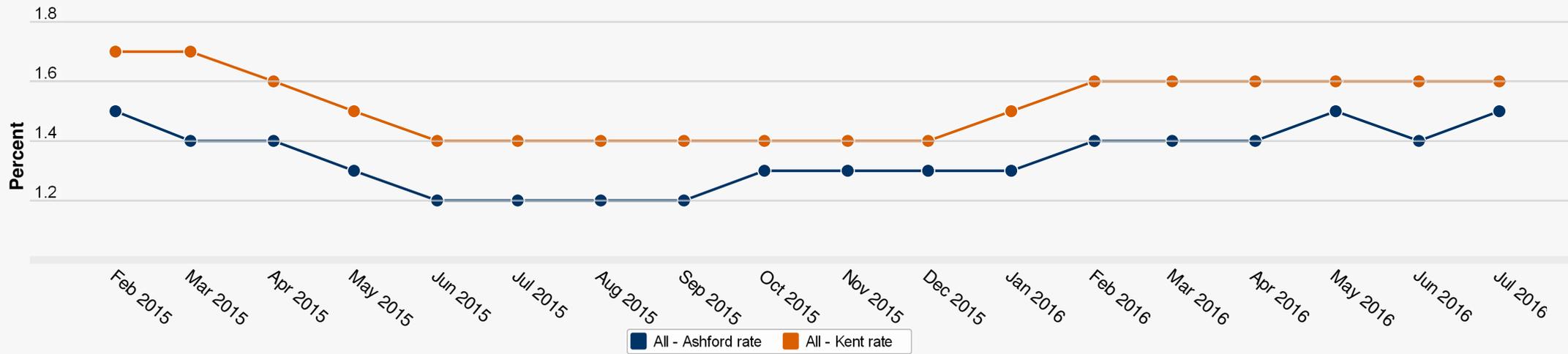
## Town Centre Development and Future Plans



In July 2016 Cabinet approved Phase 1 of the Commercial Quarter Office Development, including the transfer of key parcels of land.

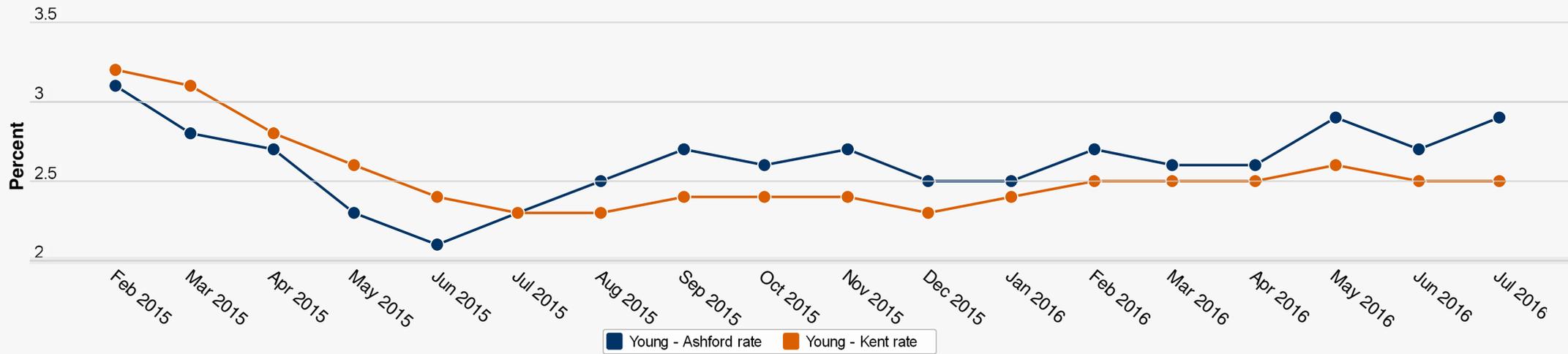
# Unemployment

All

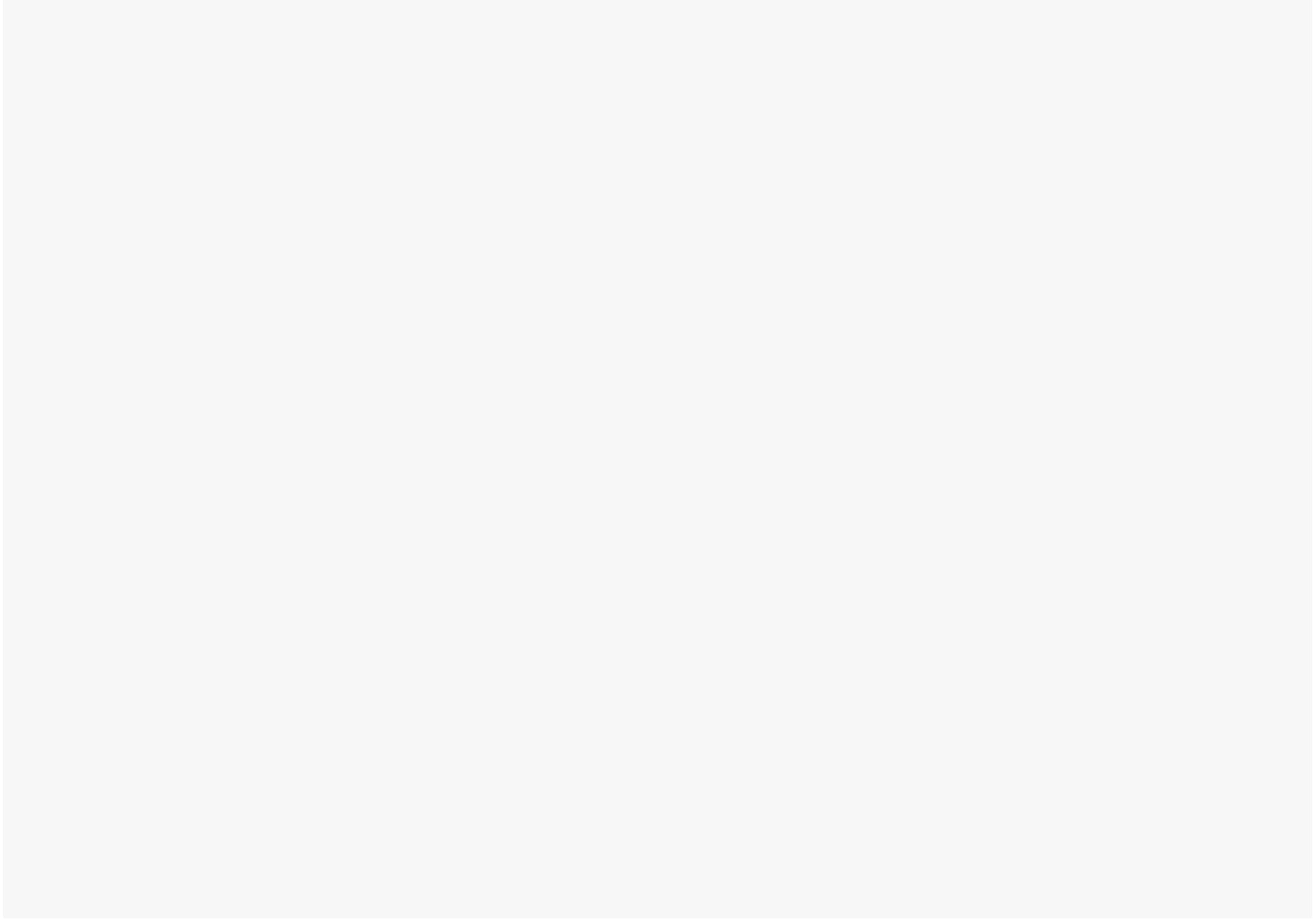


The total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed rose slightly over the last two quarters following a period of sustained fall. It now stands at just above **1,000**. This is still around 10% less than at the same time last year, constituting around 1.5% of Ashford's working age population. Just over 100 claimants a month either returned to work or increasing their employment hours.

## Young People



The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit has also risen slightly, by around 30 over the last quarter.





# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Living Ashford

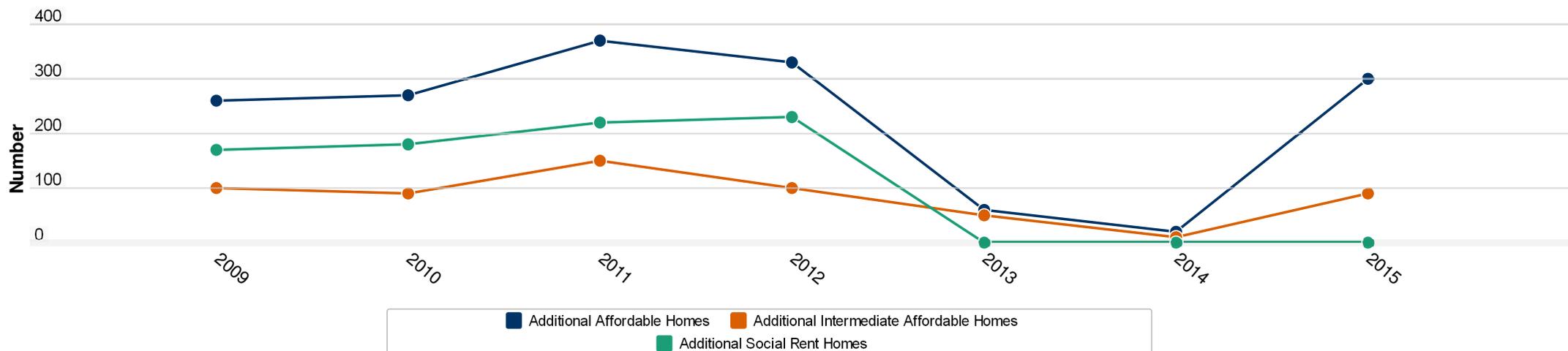
In June 2016 Cabinet agreed a suite of revised Housing enforcement policies, updating the council's approach in areas including -

- Private Sector Housing Enforcement and Prosecution Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for Ashford Borough Housing Tenants

## Affordable Housing

The total additional Affordable Homes is made up of the following two main areas -

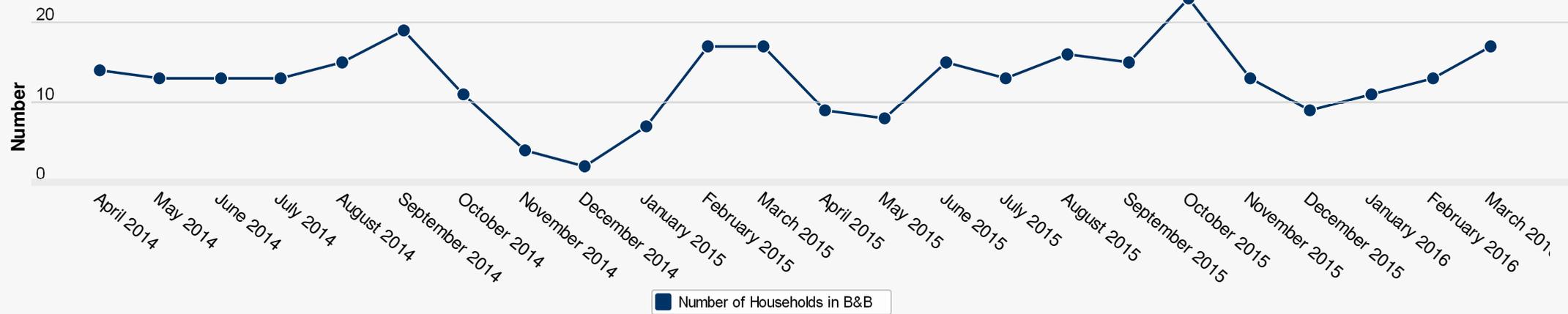
- Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
- Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



The economic downturn that occurred in 2008 had negative consequences for the housing market, though impacts for affordable housing completions were not felt until later - with a low point occurring in 2013. This position has since reversed during the last year and is expected to return to between 100 and 150 additional properties over the next few years.

In July 2016 Cabinet approved a set of revised eligibility criteria to widen the scope of affordable housing delivery in the Borough to meet local housing needs. This will allow for a wider range of models to be considered in the future whilst maintaining quality development and management, opening up opportunities to explore alternative delivery models to boost supply where traditional forms of affordable housing delivery may not be viable - whilst safeguarding the Council's reputation and financial needs.

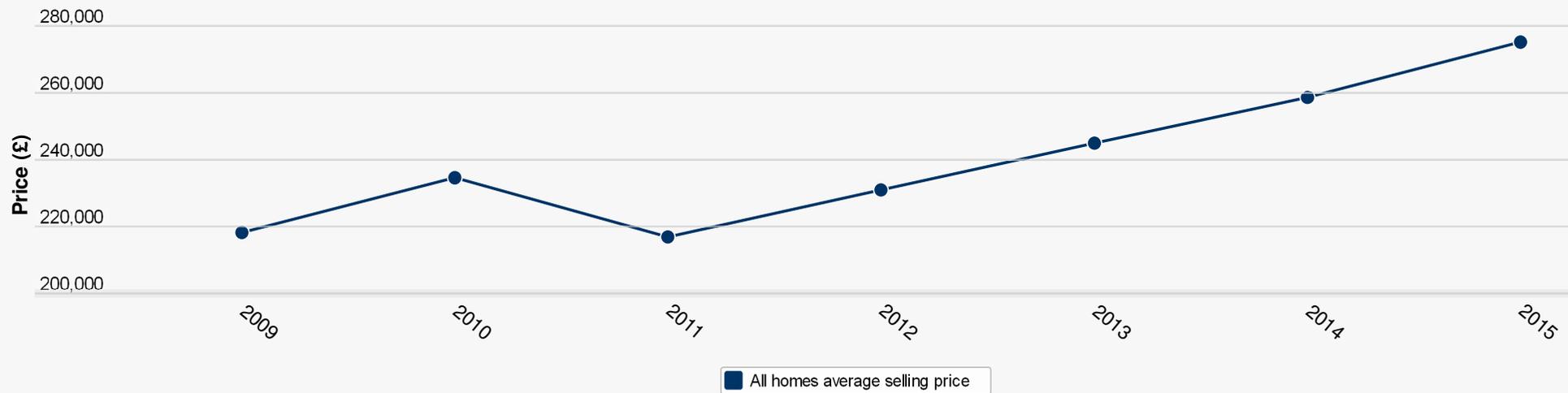
## Temporary Accommodation



At the end of March 2016 numbers of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) stood at **17**, (which was the same as March 2015) of which 10 households included children or pregnant women. The B&B costs for 2015/16 were very marginally below budget, however pressure still remains going forward on the service.

## House prices and the number of homes sold

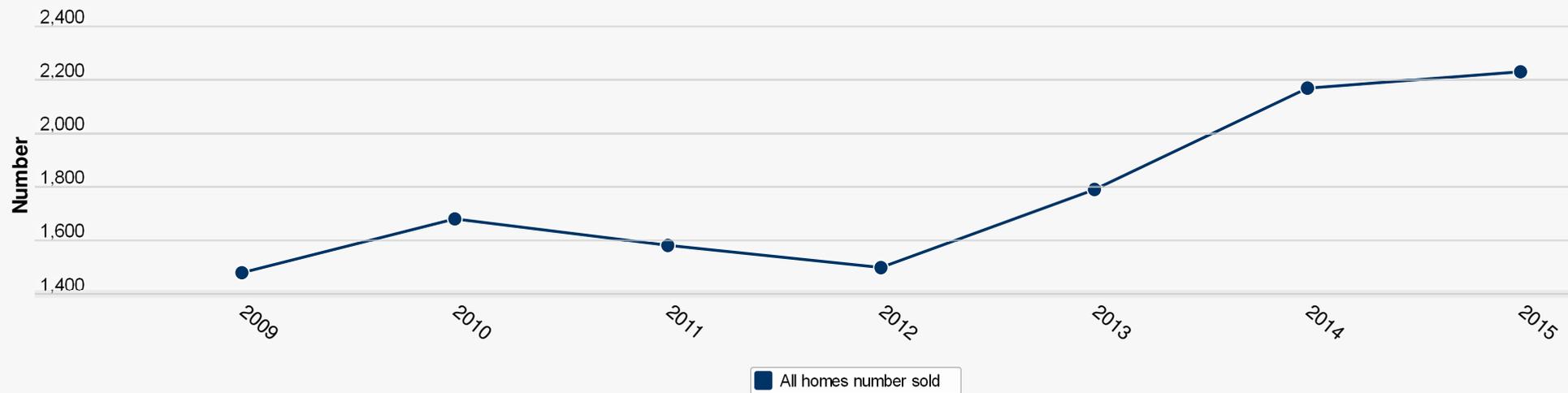
### House Price



More widely, the average house price in Kent (KCC area) during 2015 was **£283,323**. The average price in Kent (KCC area) has increased for four consecutive years and is now **21%** higher than where they were in 2008.

There were **26,455** property transactions in Kent during the year, **2.87%** lower than in the year before.

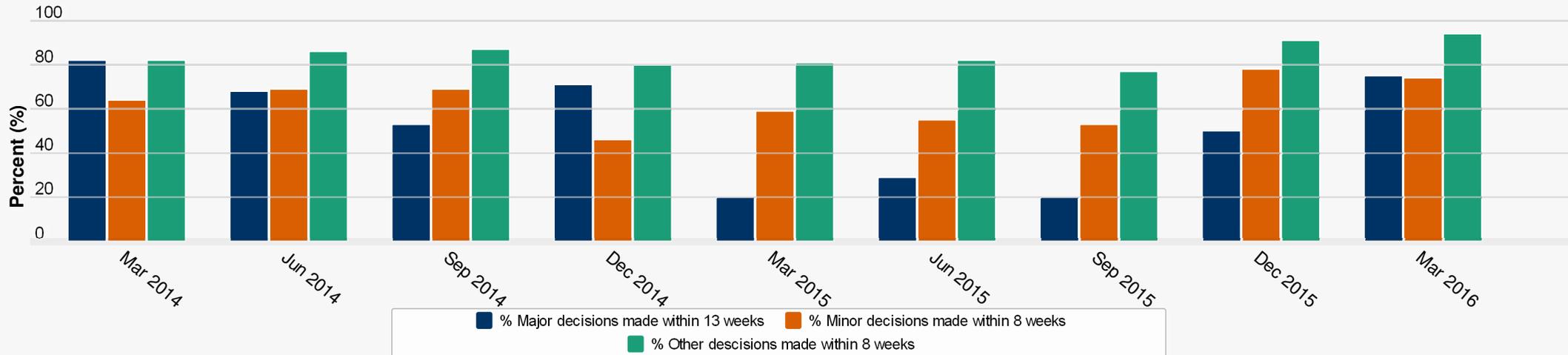
### Number of Houses Sold



# Planning



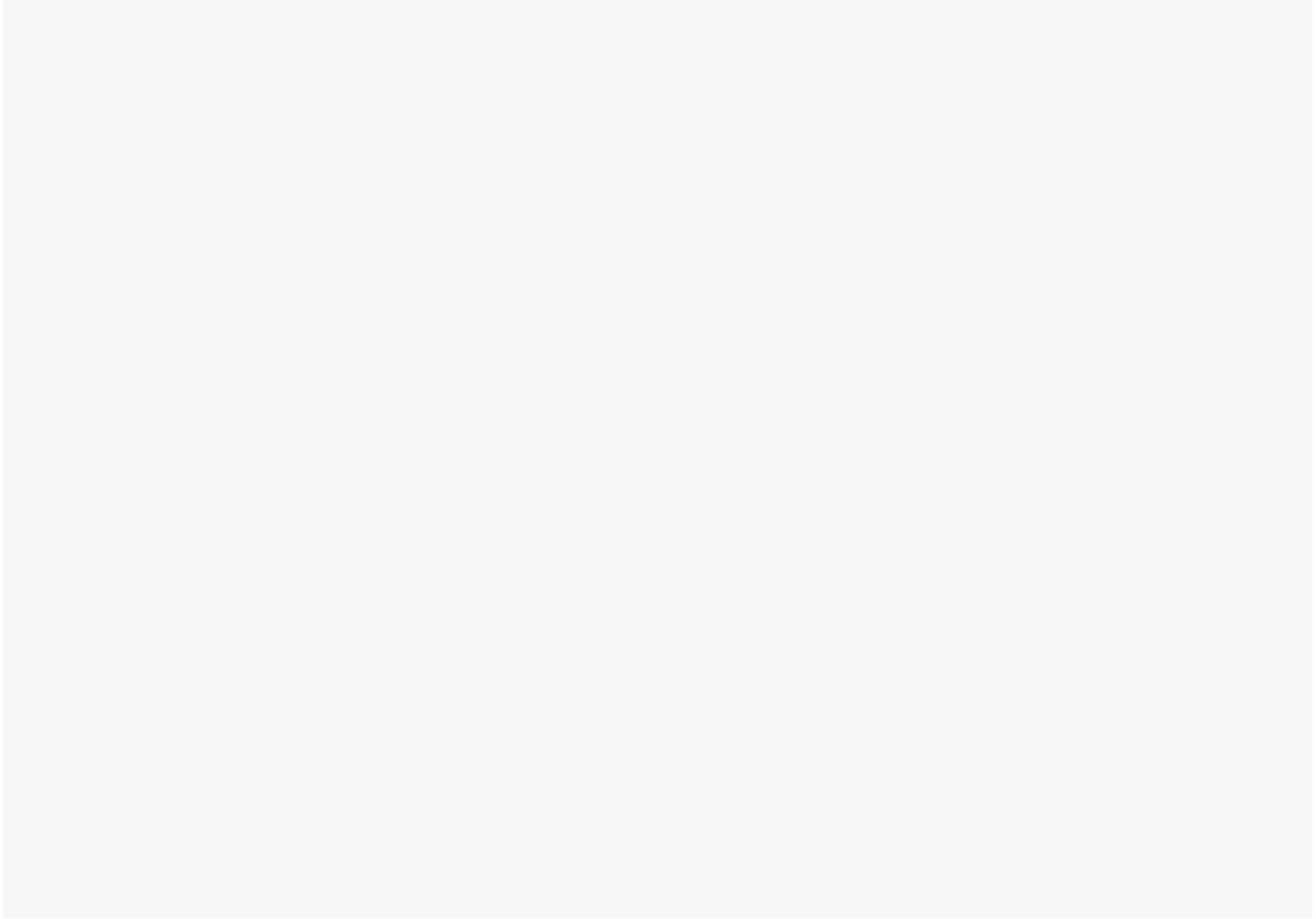
The number of planning applications considered by the council has remained relatively steady, whilst the last year has seen significant improvement in the percent of decisions made within target.

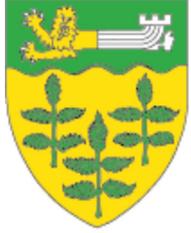


In October 2015 the Cabinet endorsed a new Quality Monitoring approach, which seeks to drive up the standards of new homes built, the places they are part of and the environment around them.

Building upon this, In May 2016 the Cabinet agreed -

- a set of simple and clear terms underpinning the Council's fair but robust approach to enforcement.
- a service-based enforcement plan which sets out the Council's approach to enforcement including performance standards. In parallel with this work the website is being reviewed to provide a user-friendly 'report it' function and accessible explanations of the approach the Council takes in the many areas of enforcement it is involved in.



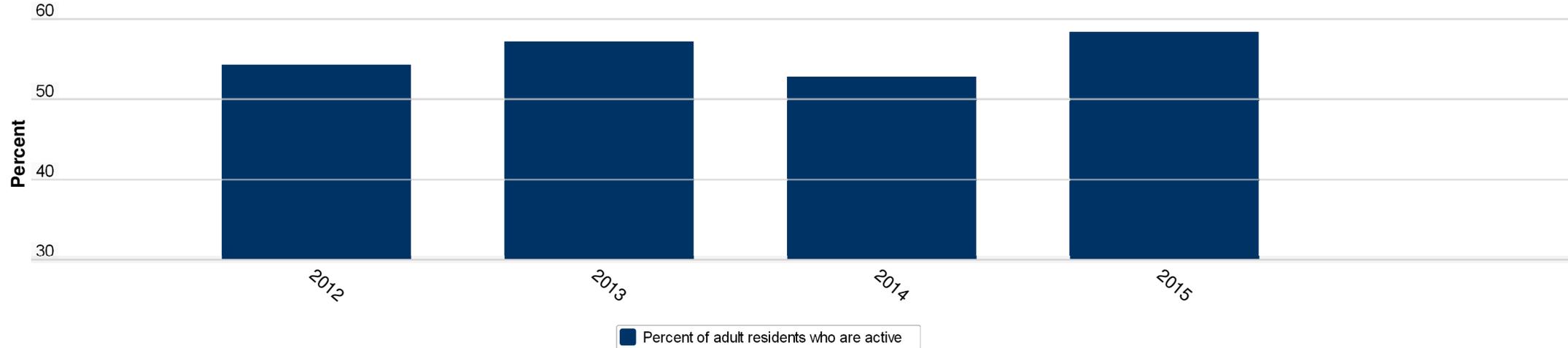


# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Active & Creative Ashford

### Healthy Lives & Active Living



Sport England conduct an annual survey which gives an overall understanding of the sport and health profile of Ashford, and the proportion of those active across the borough. This has remained remarkably steady of the last few years. Information is drawn from the Department of Health and the Office for National Statistics.

## Sport

The borough provides a wide range of leisure facilities covering a wide range of sports, including -

- **119** grass football pitches
- **3** 3G football pitches
- **4** 2G football pitches
- **32** tennis courts across 12 locations
- the Julie Rose Stadium's world-class athletics track
- **5** golf courses

### ***Courtside***

Since opening in 2006, Courtside provides outside space for six tennis and six netball courts. It is used regularly by the John Wallis Academy and the Ashford Netball league. Current usage (excluding school use and casual bookings) -

- Average winter weekly usage - 431
- Average summer weekly usage - 811
- Average Annual Usage - 28,288

### ***Pitchside***

Since opening in 2008, Pitchside provides a full 3G football pitch (with space for two mini pitches), two five-a-side pitches, three six-a-side pitches and two seven-a-side pitches. The site also contains a Multi Use Games Area. Current usage (excluding school use and casual bookings) -

- Average winter weekly usage - 1,030
- Average summer weekly usage - 510
- Average Annual Usage - 41,260

Ashford currently boasts **63** *Talented Performers* who are supported in a number of ways to help them excel at their chosen sport.

## Supporting Culture and Creativity

### ***The Voluntary and Community Sector***

Ashford has around **850** active charities, community groups and social enterprises.

The Council's Ward Member Grant Scheme and Single Grants Gateway provides support to groups on projects and initiatives across the borough. In 2015 these two schemes helped 142 groups in total -

- **27** through community grants
- **115** through member grants

The Council also levered in just over £1 million in external funding to support its cultural efforts.

### ***The Create Festival***

2016 saw Create celebrate its 21st birthday, with around **12,000** people enjoying the various activities available throughout the day -

- 78% were regular attendees and 22% were new to the event
- £149,000 estimated spend in the local economy by Create attendees on associated travel, accommodation, food and drink
- 67,000 people viewed Create's online video campaigns leading up to the event, with the Official Create 2016 film being viewed by over 4,000 people in just 48 hours
- A large social media presence, with 46,000 tweets about Create in July, with 3512 individual visits and 225 mentions

### ***Revelation St Mary's***

Delivered by the St Mary's Arts Trust, Revelation St Mary's is Ashford town centre's award winning venue, offering a series of quality events in an intimate and awe-inspiring setting.

The Trust delivers -

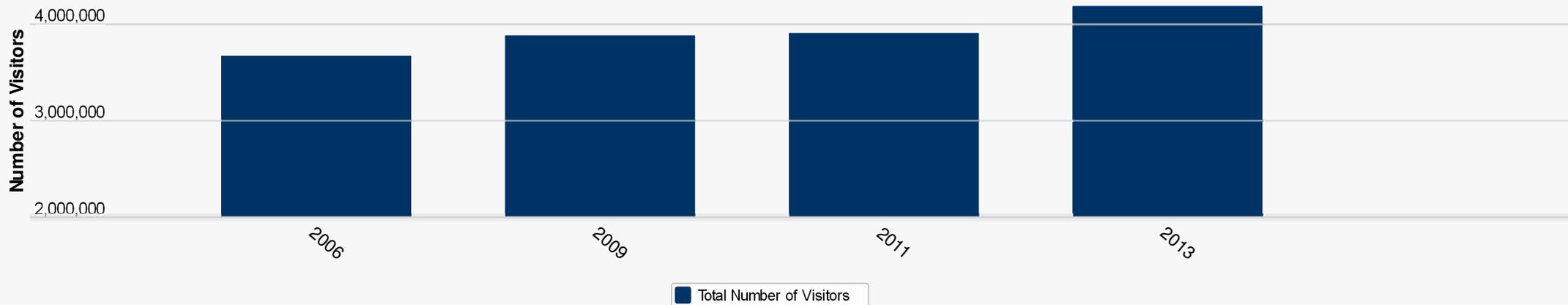
- a broad scope and regularity of events, with well-known names and emerging artists
- dynamic programming with interconnecting strands of work
- a year-round artist development and schools programme
- artistically-driven audience development, backed by targeted campaigns

In 2015 the venue welcomed **8,924** visitors to their productions, and now begins work on phase two of the project.

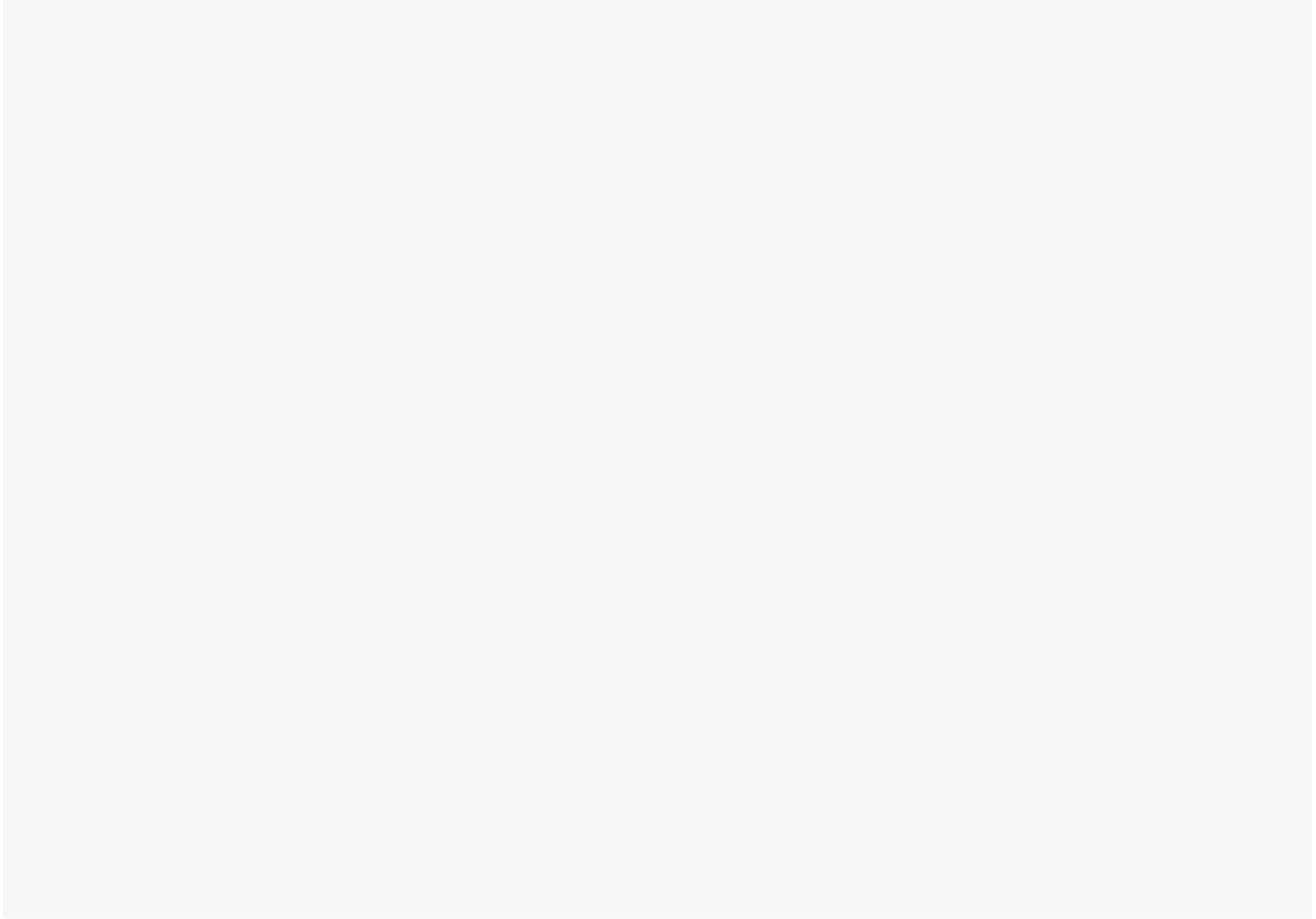
### ***Tourism***

In June 2016 the Council launched a new Ashford Heritage Trail, and handy leaflet, which takes visitors on a journey through history to discover heritage sites around the town centre.

The Council has also produced a Museum and Heritage Trail, which introduces visitors to sites further-afield across the borough.



Ashford continues to show steady growth in the number of those visiting the borough. The number of overseas trips rose by **20%** between 2011 and 2013 (the latest survey), with 433,000 people staying overnight. This places Ashford as the third most visited destination in Kent for overseas staying visitors.





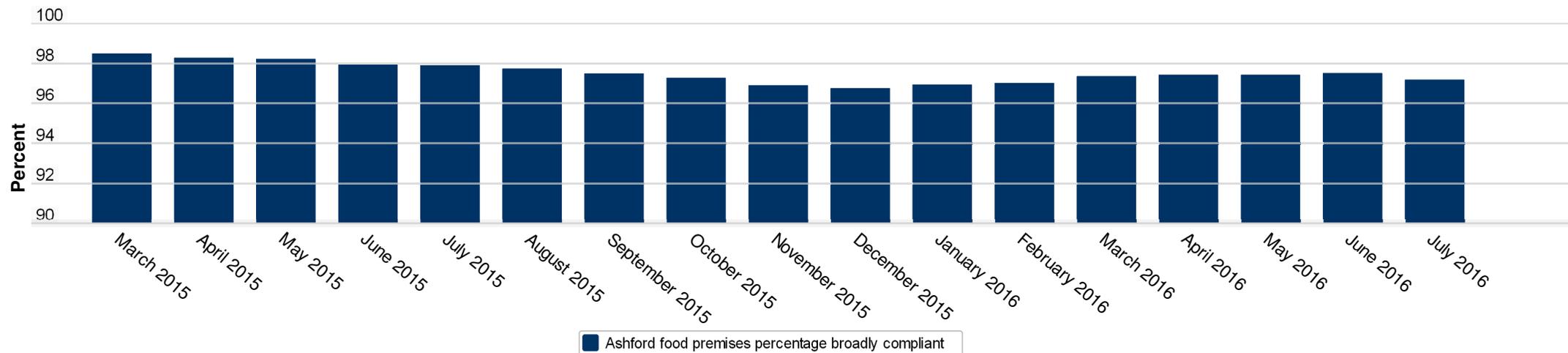
# Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

## Headline Report

## Attractive Ashford

### Quality across the borough

#### *Food Business Hygiene*



There are almost **1,300** registered food businesses within the Borough. All are inspected on a regular basis according to their risk category.

This graph shows the percentage of businesses that are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards. Any business found to be non-compliant either receives a formal letter or a revisit.

Guidance is provided to food businesses in the first instance and notices are service if conditions do not improve. Food businesses are also given a food hygiene rating which can view at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/food-hygiene-rating-scheme>.

### ***ASPIRE - Improving the presentation of the borough***

A new in-house ground maintenance service will be rolled out in October 2016. The new service, called Aspire Landscape Management, will cover the day-to-day work of mowing, pruning, planting, clearing and litter picking on various spaces owned by the Council including open green space, parks, floral beds, cemeteries, areas around housing sites, open green space, hedges, sports pitches and associated footpaths.

This initiative is a key part of delivering the adopted Land Management Improvement Plan, which aims to make the borough a pleasant and enjoyable place to live, work, visit and enjoy, enhance Ashford's overall appearance and attractiveness and raise civic pride and make the borough more attractive for residents, visitors and businesses.

### ***Other measures to improve the look of the borough***

The Borough Council owns approximately 1,600 amenity and footway lights around the borough as distinct from the Highway and safety lighting that is owned by the County Council.

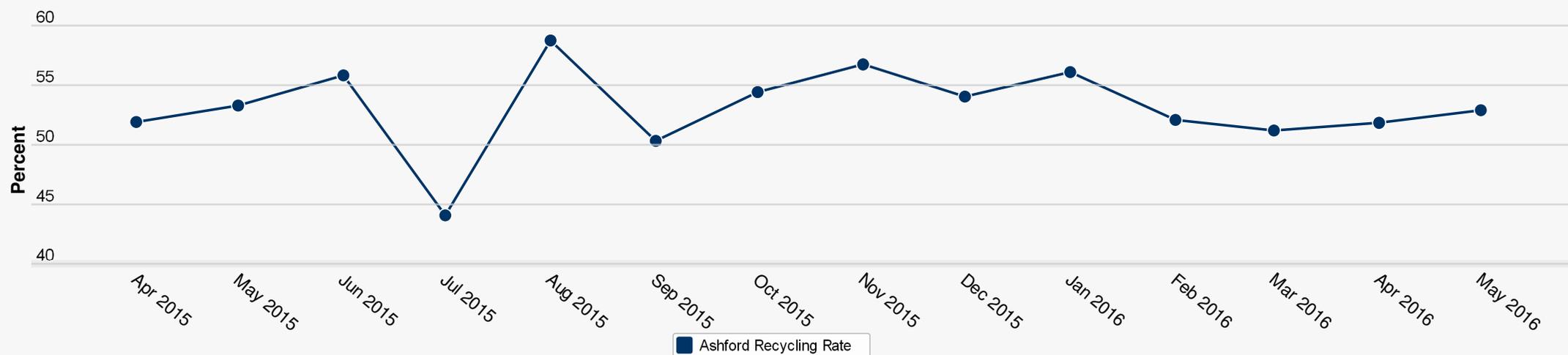
In May 2016 the Cabinet agreed to fund up to £1 million as a capital investment to upgrade and replace as appropriate the Borough Council's amenity and footway lighting columns to adoptable KCC standard and to transfer as many of the assets as possible to KCC.

In July 2016 Cabinet considered a review of the Town Centre Action Team (T-CAT), and agreed a set of further improvements to the service.

T-CAT was formed three years ago with the intention of having a flexible and reactive resource to keep the town centre attractive and well-looked-after. Since that time, T-CAT has extended its role, to encompass work in both Ashford (as the 'urban' centre) and Tenterden (the rural centre), ensuring that the two towns remain clean and tidy, with street furniture kept in state of good repair.

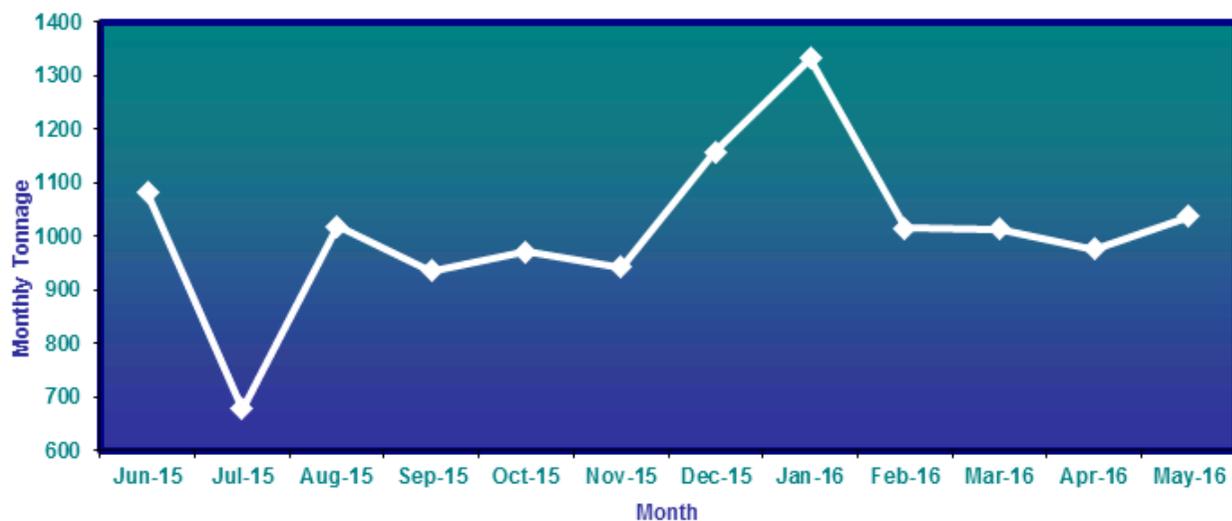
T-CAT's efforts have also been extended, expanding to include support to the council's economic development function: fitting out/decorating shops (particularly in Park Mall), supporting the monthly Farmers' Market (setting up and dismantling), plus constructing planters and bus stop 'libraries'.

### ***Recycling***



As expected, following two straight years of impressive increases in recycling rates, recycling rates have levelled-out over the last year, with the important next step to consolidate this improved performance.

### KCC - Ashford - Monthly Tonnage



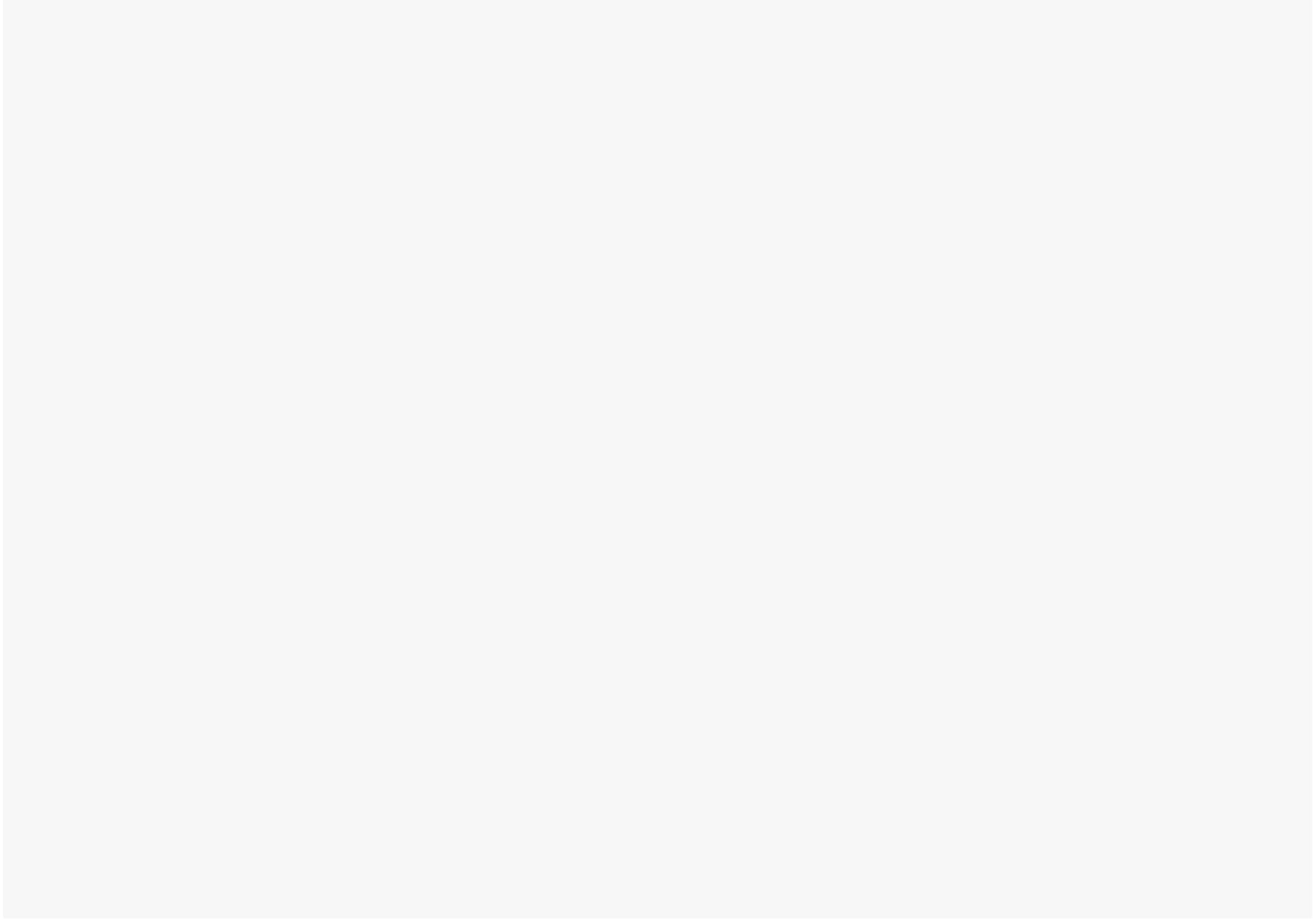
In December DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford is now in the top 10% recycling councils in the country. During 2014/15 the borough was the best in Kent at producing the least waste per household, and also remained the second most improved recycler across the country - with a recycling rate of 55.3%, an improvement of 13.4% on the year before.

Largest increases in Recycling (2014/15)					
Authority	Region	Authority Type	Percentage Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2014/15 (EX NI 192)	Percentage Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2013/14 (EX NI 192)	Improvement (Percentage points)
South Bucks District Council	South east	Collection	50.7%	33.4%	17.3%
Ashford Borough Council	South east	Collection	55.3%	41.9%	13.4%
East Cambridgeshire District Council	Eastern	Collection	56.6%	45.5%	11.2%
Gravesham Borough Council	South east	Collection	34.2%	24.5%	9.7%
North Warwickshire Borough Council	W Midlands	Collection	48.7%	39.8%	8.9%
Middlesbrough Borough Council	North East	Unitary	36.3%	27.7%	8.6%
Lambeth LB	London	Collection	28.3%	21.1%	7.2%
Halton Borough Council	North West	Unitary	46.8%	39.8%	7.0%
Dudley MBC	W Midlands	Unitary	42.2%	35.7%	6.5%
Waverley Borough Council	South east	Collection	51.7%	45.2%	6.5%

### Increasing the range of things to do

In May 2016 the Cabinet gave its support to the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre (AIMREC), and agreed to provide a mortgage loan to help the scheme's supporters to purchase the necessary land, owned by Kier, to enable the company to apply for significant funding from various sources including a capital grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The company's business plan shows that the centre can substantially diversify and boost Ashford's tourism and visitor economy with an anticipated 500,000 visitors per annum.



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## **Raising the Profile and Awareness of Scrutiny and Increasing its Influence and Impact**

To: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

By: **Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer**

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**Summary:** **This report summarises research into Scrutiny practices and procedures employed by authorities around the four focal topics listed in the scoping report previously presented to the Committee.**

**Background Papers:** Scoping Report – Review of Raising the Profile and Awareness of Scrutiny – Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 28 June 2016

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### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The inclusion of an Overview and Scrutiny function within the Council's structure is a legal requirement of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). The Cabinet is the primary decision making body of the Borough Council, however the Overview and Scrutiny function can play a role in supporting the Cabinet's work.
- 1.2 Powers afforded to the committee include reviewing or scrutinising decisions made by the Cabinet and reporting or making recommendations to the Cabinet or the authority on any aspect of Council business or any matters affecting the borough or its population.
- 1.3 To date, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has examined a diverse range of topics and issues, including water supply, healthcare provision, roads infrastructure, public transport and various areas of Council policy. The committee also assesses annual reports from the Community Safety Partnership and provides scrutiny of the Council's budget setting process.
- 1.4 It was agreed at the committee's meeting of 20 October 2015 that the Overview and Scrutiny committee would undertake a more strategic approach to add value to the authority, including increasing engagement with external partners. The need for Overview and Scrutiny to undertake a more fulfilling role in relation to the work of the Cabinet and Council has been noted by members and it is on this principle that research has been focused.
- 1.5 At its meeting of 28 June 2016 the Committee agreed that a review should be undertaken to raise the profile and awareness of the Borough Council's Scrutiny function. Members were asked to forward ideas to the Chairman or the Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer.

- 1.6 Officers have collated the ideas received and sought examples of notable scrutiny practice from many different types of authorities of varying sizes from across the country as well as examples cited by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). These are summarised below for the Committee's consideration, however the findings below are presented not in terms of what Overview and Scrutiny at Ashford should do, but in terms of practices it may wish to consider.

## **2. Exerting influence and building positive relationships**

- 2.1 In informing this review, Committee members noted that Cabinet are under no obligation to act on recommendations made through Overview and Scrutiny if they do not wish to. Taking this point into account, Officers have explored how other authorities have built greater cabinet accountability into their scrutiny procedures and these findings are outlined below.

### **Robust and realistic recommendations**

- 2.2 Positive working relationships with the Cabinet, senior officers and partners are of vital importance if the scrutiny function is to be carried out effectively. Overview and Scrutiny should act as a 'critical friend' to the Cabinet, and developing robust and realistic recommendations as part of the scrutiny process in partnership with Cabinet members, senior officers and partners may aid in building trust and developing a closer working relationship between the participant bodies.
- 2.3 Within Winchester City Council the Overview and Scrutiny committee receive an annual report summarising progress made on key projects that contribute to achieving the Council's Community Strategy. Each Portfolio Holder outlines (in brief) progress made on projects and corporate objectives within their remit over the previous year, and the committee are invited to raise any issues arising with the Leader or Portfolio Holder or refer items of significance to the Cabinet.
- 2.4 Northampton Borough Council employ a rigorous monitoring regime for committee recommendations is in place, with Cabinet Members reporting back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee twice a year on action taken in respect of recommendations made through reviews. Cabinet and Senior Management Team also attend an annual Work Programming event for the committee, and Cabinet members are given the opportunity to inform the Overview and Scrutiny committee of their priorities for the year.

Possible recommendation 1: *The Committee could recommend the agreement of an annual work programme informed by and in response to the Cabinet's forward plans.*

### **Scrutiny procedure**

- 2.5 The relationship with Cabinet prior to the submission of recommendations can take various forms. The committee could choose to undertake informal liaison with relevant cabinet members over recommendations prior to their

submission; or it could adopt a more regulated arrangement similar to Leeds City Council, where formalised procedure rules exist governing consultation with senior officers and Executive Members. Within Leeds agreement has been made detailing actions to be undertaken in response to scrutiny recommendations, including publication of the Executive's responses.

- 2.6 The effective involvement of external partners in all aspects of the scrutiny process is of vital importance in achieving a successful 'outward' scrutiny role. Noting the concerns raised at the committee's meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015, external bodies may show greater willingness to engage with being scrutinised if they are more closely involved in the scrutiny process for reviews of other areas. For example, representatives of the South East Coast Ambulance Service may wish to be involved in a review focused on strategic road infrastructure as it will affect their service delivery.

*Possible recommendation 2: A possible recommendation in respect of engaging external partners could be that the Committee's work programme is circulated to external partner organisations in advance, either as a way to increase public engagement or as a means to gather evidence.*

### **Collaboration protocols**

- 2.7 Some councils have clearly defined processes and outlined protocols for collaborative scrutiny with key partners on strategic issues, whilst a few authorities co-opt external partners onto Scrutiny panels for specified purposes.
- 2.8 In other authorities protocols exist for the co-option of external partners onto Overview and Scrutiny in a non-voting capacity for a period of two years through a formal application process. Co-optees may re-apply at the end of the two year period, however the limit allows for co-optees to stand down if they wish and enables the committee to pursue representatives with different experience and skills.
- 2.9 Under such protocols, co-optee positions are listed on the Council's website and circulated to Area Action Partnerships (local forums which enable public participation in the delivery of key services), with applicants required to submit a short statement explaining why they wish to be involved in scrutiny and what they can contribute. Suitable candidates are then shortlisted by the Overview and Scrutiny Chair, Vice-Chair and a (minority) committee member for informal interviews. Successful applicants are appointed and given an induction into the scrutiny process prior to their first meeting.
- 2.10 It has been noted that in the aftermath of the EU referendum result there has been a marked increase in incidents of hate crimes and race related crime across the country, and members have expressed concern over the potential isolating and marginalising effects of recent events may have on the varied ethnic communities within the Borough's population.

- 2.11 The appointment of external partners to Overview and Scrutiny focus groups and panels has been successfully used by authorities such as Brighton and Hove City Council to bolster reviews into community integration, and the adoption of similar procedures for certain reviews in Ashford could be beneficial, particularly for reviews with an outward focus.
- 2.12 Less formal arrangements can also be of use in engaging external partners, particularly when specific reviews are undertaken. For example Birmingham City Council, as part of its enquiry into dementia services, utilised the expertise of partner organisations (including an NHS commissioning manager) to identify a cross-section of service users including dementia sufferers and carers through involvement in NHS focus and participation groups.
- 2.13 Some service users then sat alongside committee members during two days of evidence gathering sessions to hear evidence from various sources. Whilst the service users were not co-optees to the committee, their equivalent position within the committee allowed them to respond immediately (from a service user perspective) to the evidence presented before them. This enabled the committee to react more rapidly to the evidence presented and work towards more suitable recommendations ahead of the final report being generated.

Possible recommendation 3: *The Committee could review the existing processes for co-option within point 3 of the procedure rules for Overview and Scrutiny to allow for the incorporation of external partners as members of task groups for specific scrutiny reviews.*

### **Working with the public**

- 2.14 Members have expressed the view that direct gathering of evidence by the committee rather than only receiving Officer written reports may be beneficial to the Scrutiny process, and the Overview and Scrutiny committee may wish to consider how it could incorporate different techniques to enhance engagement and improve outcomes as they relate to specific reviews.
- 2.15 In a review to address issues associated with rising number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) in its area, Braintree District Council's Scrutiny Committee adapted its working practices to be more open and help stakeholders feel at ease. Committee members met with local employers at their place of work and talked to young people at a local hostel over pizza - this resulted in a representative group of young people attending the final committee meeting on the review.
- 2.16 Members also suggested that greater public engagement may be achieved if committee meetings could take place in locations other than the Civic Centre for specific one-off issues to try and encourage local attendance – for example where logistical issues exist which may preclude interested members of the public (such as elderly or young residents) from attending an evening meeting at the Civic Centre the committee could meet at an

alternative location more suited to attendance by the group(s) concerned with the issue at hand. Hackney Council undertook face-to-face engagement with residents outside of a committee meeting setting to inform a review into improving access to services for young disabled people.

Possible recommendation 4: *A potential recommendation in this area could be to take Overview and Scrutiny to the public for evidence gathering by members or for meetings where the committee deems it would be beneficial.*

### **3. Making a difference...Demonstrating impact**

#### **Review methodology**

- 3.1 Some councils have a formalised, multi-stage process for scrutiny reviews clearly identifying the path of the review from topic selection to post-implementation monitoring. Charnwood Borough Council utilises a specific pro-forma for scrutiny briefings, designed to direct the information presented towards areas where review may be beneficial and indicate whether a further review is required.
- 3.2 The adoption of such formal scrutiny review methodology may be of benefit in enabling the committee to demonstrate the impact of its work throughout the scrutiny process and could serve to align the scrutiny process more closely with the corporate approach to project management.
- 3.3 The majority of internally generated reports currently presented to the committee are in cabinet format with recommendations (typically to note the contents of the report) ready prepared. Having reports framed in this manner can result in a high incidence of 'passive' recommendations to receive and note reports.
- 3.4 The Cabinet report template supports and accord with the decision making powers of Cabinet. Noting the difference in function and powers between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny, the need for a different type of report template with a greater emphasis on information gathering can be seen.
- 3.5 Therefore the adoption of a briefing note format similar to Charnwood which highlights in a clear and concise format the key aims and required outcomes of the activity, policy or service being reported on may prove beneficial to the committee's work whilst complementing longer, regular reports. Examples of this format are attached as appendix 1 (blank) and appendix 2 (populated).

#### **Responses and monitoring**

- 3.6 The complementary element to robust recommendations and key to demonstrating the impact of scrutiny will be tracking what responses are made to the committee's recommendations, and monitoring the implementation of change where recommendations are accepted. How this monitoring takes place, and who is responsible for it can vary dependent on circumstance and the level on influence the committee can exert.

- 3.7 Certain authorities place all responsibility for implementation with the relevant service officers, with monitoring undertaken by the relevant Executive member. By comparison some other councils undertake reviews of agreed recommendations six or twelve months after adoption, requesting updates at this time from the responsible party on implementation progress. Monitoring can be carried out through use of a tracker summarising the pre- and post-meeting actions with deadlines for recommendations to be actioned or updates to be reported back to committee.
- 3.8 The incorporation of monitoring into the existing Overview and Scrutiny tracker already provided alongside the agenda papers may be beneficial in demonstrating the impact of the committee's work, particularly where the implementation (and consequential effects) of agreed recommendations can be recorded and made publicly accessible.

Possible recommendation 5: *The committee could recommend the adoption of specific document formats for scrutiny briefings and modification of the existing tracker to include progress on scrutiny recommendations.*

### **Robust recommendations**

- 3.9 To ensure the Overview and Scrutiny committee is adding value at every stage, greater emphasis should be placed on making constructive, evidence-based 'active' recommendations for consideration by Cabinet and external partners where appropriate. The agreement of specific mechanisms for Overview and Scrutiny to review the responses to and (where accepted) the implementation of recommendations it has made may also prove beneficial in this regard to all concerned parties.
- 3.10 Since partner organisations need only "have regard to" recommendations (rather than being under a legal obligation to respond to them as Cabinet are) it may be prudent for the form and broad content of a response from an external partner to be agreed in the early stages of the scrutiny process.
- 3.11 An absence of 'active' recommendations may raise questions over the value of the scrutiny process, particularly in situations where improvements cannot feasibly be made. This may be avoidable to some degree through the committee still providing a response in situations where no recommendations for improvement are made, as in Leeds where an obligation is placed on the Scrutiny Board to formally 'close' a scrutiny review and provide its reasons for not making recommendations.

### **Return on investment**

- 3.12 A checklist of agreed and completed actions may be a helpful mechanism to manage implementation, but this may not ultimately demonstrate whether putting scrutiny recommendations into effect has resulted in an improvement to a service or better outcomes for local residents.

- 3.13 Mapping the return on investment of any recommended change can be a very useful tool to demonstrate the benefits (in terms of the value that can be added) of implementing the recommendations arising from a scrutiny review - Peterborough City Council utilised this approach in a welfare review to show that continuing investment into a Community Assistance Scheme would prevent significant costs to the Council and its partners.
- 3.14 Revising the existing tracker as suggested in 3.7 to enable more resilient monitoring of progress made in acting on recommendations may also suggest (dependent on the review in question) effective measures or outputs for establishing added value if coupled with reports back to the committee on changes that have arisen from the implementation of Scrutiny recommendations.
- 3.15 In some instances establishing a return on investment in financial terms will be difficult. In these cases, it may be more appropriate to work on the basis of measuring the social return on investment. Feedback could be sought directly from service users or stakeholders (where appropriate) to establish what impact scrutiny has had 'on the ground'; either in the form of direct reporting to the committee or through surveys and open calls for submissions. If sufficient evidence is gathered prior to the scrutiny review from stakeholders it may be possible to build a 'before and after' picture to demonstrate the impact of scrutiny.

Possible recommendation 6: *The committee could include forecasting of the potential return on investment in the pre-assessment of a scrutiny review to focus the committee's work.*

#### **4. Raising the Profile**

- 4.1 The importance of the committee's role as a means of enabling accountability should be highlighted, both internally and externally. Member feedback on the theme of raising the profile of Overview and Scrutiny highlighted the need to be proactive in selling any success stories of the committee's work as well as informing the press of upcoming reviews and scrutiny topics to build public interest.
- 4.2 The benefits of good scrutiny as a tool to shape new policies and practices are significant and if the authority can 'buy in' to the idea of scrutiny as a positive means to review then it can form a key step in the formative stages of project development. Potential methods of engaging the public in a strategic focus for scrutiny are discussed in section 5 below, however increased engagement in Overview and Scrutiny across the authority may be achievable through various means.
- 4.3 Highlighting the experience and background of committee members may demonstrate that the committee can bring a fresh 'outside eye' perspective to exploratory project work – this may be readily achievable through working with the Council's communications team to profile Overview and Scrutiny

through the Staff newsletter (Root and Branch), Ashford Voice or the authority's social media channels.

- 4.4 The committee could reinforce to the rest of the authority how it can help to be a means of engaging external stakeholders at an early stage in the development of projects and policy initiatives. Documenting a short review and internally circulating a summary of the process and outcomes may serve as a useful case study to inform and engage staff throughout the authority in the work of Scrutiny.

Possible recommendation 7: *The committee could recommend profiling its work and membership in internal and external publications to build public interest in the scrutiny process.*

### **Social media and external liaison**

- 4.5 Committee Members noted that identifying the most appropriate ways to improve communication with the public may be most readily achieved through asking for opinions from members of the public who already communicate with the public on matters such as planning consultations; and inviting residents to identify areas where they feel scrutiny may add benefit.
- 4.6 Northampton Borough Council involves the public in setting the agenda for its annual Overview and Scrutiny work programme. A press release is sent from the Chairman each year to invite public input into the work programme. Requests can be made through the authority's website or directly to the Scrutiny Officer and are considered at an annual work programming event (see paragraph 2.2 above).
- 4.7 The Authority also retains details of requesting parties, consultees and members of the public involved in the scrutiny process and regularly contacts them regarding suggestions for future scrutiny reviews. Subject to compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, collation of contact details for responders on various Council consultations could provide a potential source of resident engagement with the scrutiny process.
- 4.8 Enabling the submission of views by social media significantly aided Stoke-on-Trent City Council in increasing public participation in the 18-24 age bracket through its review of the night-time economy. Ashford Borough Council's twitter account (as of September) has over 6000 followers who may be a receptive audience for gathering input into scrutiny reviews and generating interest in the committee's work.
- 4.9 Utilising social media proactively may provide a means to enable greater public participation for specific scrutiny reviews both in terms of publicising the review and calling for evidence from the borough's population.

Possible recommendation 8: *The committee could utilise social media as a means to enable public participation in the scrutiny process for specific scrutiny topics.*

Possible recommendation 9: *Calls for evidence for future scrutiny reviews, or for public submission of topics for review could be used to build a contact database for Overview and Scrutiny to publicise its work.*

### **Strategic scrutiny**

- 4.10 The move towards a standardised Project Management model within the authority may be a good opportunity to align the committee more closely with strategic projects at a formative stage. Such approaches have been used by Brighton and Hove City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- 4.11 A revision of the presentation of scrutiny through the Council's website to highlight its role and the benefits of public participation may prove beneficial. Highlighting scrutiny and opportunities for participation through social media, Council publications (such as Ashford Voice) and the local press may prove useful tools to raise awareness of scrutiny within the borough and encourage participation.
- 4.12 Successful and effective involvement of scrutiny in key projects, particularly at a formative stage, may provide useful case studies to demonstrate to the wider authority and external partners not only the work that the committee undertakes but also the benefits of a robust scrutiny process. Increasing the role of scrutiny at an early stage in strategic projects may also benefit the public perception of the authority and the committee's role through public and external partner participation in the development of key initiatives. This has been the case in Bradford Metropolitan District Council where scrutiny involvement enabled greater public participation in the review of Bradford's food strategy.

## **5. Engaging the Public**

- 5.1 Committee Members noted that outside the confines of the Borough Council the majority of the borough's population will likely be unaware of the existence of the Overview and Scrutiny function. Publicising the committee's role and building public engagement through the scrutiny process was repeatedly noted as being integral to raising the profile of the committee.

### **Clear communication**

- 5.2 Increasing public engagement in all stages of local government can be challenging, and authorities have attempted various means of engaging the public in scrutiny process. Vale of Glamorgan Council produces specific 'plain English' guides to scrutiny functions and public participation at scrutiny meetings.

### **Web presentation**

- 5.3 The management of public participation on the Council's website can also be impacting - Cardiff Council's website uses a layout and style which places scrutiny as an individual element of its 'Your Council' section, rather than

covering it under the same heading as other committees. This serves to highlight to the public the key role that scrutiny plays within the wider work of the authority.

5.4 Merton Council utilises a concise but clear web page covering its four Overview and Scrutiny panels, providing a summary of their aims, publications and relevant documents and contact details for the scrutiny team. Other councils feature a 'get involved' or similar tab on their websites covering participation in various areas of the Council's work, from local democracy to volunteering.

5.5 Live web streaming of committee meetings has also been suggested as a way to open up meetings to the public and this is already in place in a number of authorities such as Woking Borough Council.

Possible recommendation 10: *The committee could recommend that the web presentation of all Council Committees is reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny to aid public participation across the authority.*

### **Next steps**

There are significant opportunities to highlight and heighten the profile of scrutiny both within the authority and in its external relationships to the benefit of as evidenced by the work undertaken within other authorities. The above examples outline potential methods which the committee could recommend pursuit or adaptation of as means to raise its profile both internally and externally. This work would complement moves towards developing a strategic work programme for the committee.

### **The Committee is asked:**

- **To indicate which of the following proposed recommendations it would like to endorse:**

Possible recommendation 1: *The Committee could recommend the agreement of an annual work programme informed by and in response to the Cabinet's forward plans.*

Possible recommendation 2: *A possible recommendation in respect of engaging external partners could be that the Committee's work programme is circulated to external partner organisations in advance, either as a way to increase public engagement or as a means to gather evidence.*

Possible recommendation 3: *The Committee could review the existing processes for co-option within point 3 of the procedure rules for Overview and Scrutiny to allow for the incorporation of external partners as members of task groups for specific scrutiny reviews.*

Possible recommendation 4: *A potential recommendation in this area could be to take Overview and Scrutiny to the public for evidence gathering by members or for meetings where the committee deems it would be beneficial.*

Possible recommendation 5: *The committee could recommend the adoption of specific document formats for scrutiny briefings and modification of the existing tracker to include progress on scrutiny recommendations.*

Possible recommendation 6: *The committee could include forecasting of the potential return on investment in the pre-assessment of a scrutiny review to focus the committee's work.*

Possible recommendation 7: *The committee could recommend profiling its work and membership in internal and external publications to build public interest in the scrutiny process.*

Possible recommendation 8: *The committee could utilise social media as a means to enable public participation in the scrutiny process for specific scrutiny topics.*

Possible recommendation 9: *Calls for evidence for future scrutiny reviews, or for public submission of topics for review could be used to build a contact database for Overview and Scrutiny to publicise its work.*

Possible recommendation 10: *The committee could recommend that the web presentation of all Council Committees is reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny to aid public participation across the authority.*

- **To delegate 2 members of the Committee to work closely with Officers, the Chair and Vice-Chair to bring forward the agreed changes.**

## Appendix 1

### Template for presenting background information to Overview and Scrutiny Committee to determine what future action to programme

#### Report of the Director/Head of .....

ITEM            SCRUTINY BRIEFING: [TITLE]

#### Purpose of the Report

To provide background information on ..... to enable the Committee to determine whether further scrutiny is required.

#### Briefing Summary

Title	<i>Name of service area, activity or policy that is the subject of the briefing paper</i>
Aims/Objectives	<i>No more than three bullet points Include origin e.g. mandatory, corporate plan, identified need, government initiative</i>
Background	<i>No more than six bullet points setting out the current position and approach to meeting the aims/objectives</i>
Required outcomes	<i>Outline the expected outcomes in bullet point format</i>
Measures to evaluate outcomes	<i>List in bullet point format with source of any evidence to be used and providing benchmarking and comparative information where possible</i>
Implications for customers	<i>No more than four bullet points This should include a statement on consultation with customers</i>
Alternative options	<i>Are there alternatives, if so list</i>
Emerging issues	<i>No more than four bullet points This should set out the opportunities and threats etc. affecting the service/activity</i>
Timetable/Future events	<i>Are there any significant future events, e.g. new legislation, public consultation, new policies? Identify any opportunities for scrutiny</i>
Cost and staff requirements	<i>Current budget (income and expenditure) and staffing required by service/activity plus any known changes to be implemented</i>
Risks	<i>Identify in bullet points any significant risks associated with the issue and, where appropriate, mitigations that have been identified</i>

Additional information (Delete if not required)

[Provide a brief summary of any additional information that is necessary or has been specifically requested by scrutiny.]

Background Papers: None/list (*as appropriate*)

Officer(s) to contact: Name, tel (including code) and email

-

SAMPLE

## Appendix 2

### POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP – 21ST JULY 2015

#### Report of Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing

#### ITEM 6 EMPTY HOMES - SCRUTINY BRIEFING

##### Purpose of the Report

To provide background information on Empty Homes, to enable the Policy Scrutiny Group to determine whether further scrutiny is required.

##### Briefing Summary

Title	Empty Homes
Aims/Objectives	<p>To consider how empty homes can be brought back into use.</p> <p>Specific reference to houses in multiple occupation not wanting to lose their C4 Use Class designation</p> <p>Additional Information requested by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Policy Scrutiny Group:</p> <p>Statistics – how many empty properties the Council is aware of, how many have been brought back into use and those that have not.</p> <p>Options around Council Tax Rebates – to encourage bringing back into use (Is it possible to charge more than 100% for empty properties?).</p> <p>Exemptions for not paying Council Tax on empty properties – are empty student HMOs charged? What checks are undertaken that they were student HMOs?</p>
Background	<p>The number of empty properties in Charnwood is relatively small compared with some areas in the North (Burnley for example) where there are whole streets of boarded up properties. In Charnwood, empties are mostly single properties in streets and are pepper-potted around the Borough.</p> <p>In May 2015, Council Tax records showed 654 empty properties (empty for six months or more) within the Borough. Figures for previous years are detailed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2010-2011 - 747 empty properties</li><li>• 2011-2012 - 738 empty properties</li><li>• 2012-2013 - 641 empty properties</li><li>• 2013-2014 - 629 empty properties</li><li>• 2014-2015 - 611 empty properties</li></ul>

In 2013 when Council Tax benefit was replaced by Council Tax Support the Government allowed Councils to make some changes to empty property discounts and Charnwood, in line with most of the Leicestershire Boroughs, reduced the six month empty property discount down to just one month free. Any property empty for more than one month has to pay the full charge unless it is subject to significant building alterations.

Hinckley and Bosworth have applied a 150% charge on empty properties – Charnwood could seek to do the same as part of its 2016-2017 Council Tax setting but this would have to apply to all empty properties irrespective of why they are empty. Therefore if a property becomes empty due to the resident being deceased the charge would have to apply to the next of kin even if they are making every effort to try and sell it – this was the reason for the reduction to one month in 2013.

The status of student properties and if they are Houses in Multiple Occupation is part of the bigger piece of work being undertaken with the University. At present for Council Tax purposes those properties attract the one month empty property discount and a full charge applies after that.

We do not undertake retrospective visits to check if a property was a student HIMO.

Twenty seven complaints relating to empty properties were received by the Private Sector Housing Team in 2014-2015. Thirteen of the twenty seven were in respect of properties in Loughborough including Dishley/Hathern, Hastings and Lemyngton wards.

There are two strands of work related to empty properties:

- minimising the impact of empty properties that have been neglected and are impacting on surrounding properties/neighbourhoods
- encouraging them back into use.

We do not have a dedicated Empty Property Officer; however, Private Sector Housing officers can investigate and take action in respect of service requests from neighbours of empty properties where the property is affecting those living close by – e.g. nuisance from leaking pipe work or health implications from harbourage of vermin.

In 2010-2012 when we had a Homelessness Resources Officer in post, working proactively with landlords (including owners of empty properties) to source private sector accommodation for people in housing need, four Partnership Grants were completed. Since this post was made redundant in 2011/12, no further Partnership Grants have been completed. Details of the Partnership Grants can be found in the Additional Information

	<p>Section of this report,</p> <p>Our current activity in respect of encouraging empty properties back into use focuses our existing but limited human and financial resources on empty two bedroomed properties with a view to encouraging owners to take up Partnership Grants to bring their properties up to the decent homes standard in exchange for nomination rights. Partnership Grants are available to owners of properties that have been empty for six months or more. The grants fund remedial works required to make the property habitable.</p> <p>A review of our approach to empty properties work, in conjunction with other regional authorities via the East Midlands Empty Homes Forum, is proposed, however, the priority for existing resources must remain with enforcement work in situations where category one hazards are identified within occupied properties.</p> <p>The retirement of a Private Sector Housing team member in November 2014 provided an opportunity to review the job description and refocus resources on housing standards, which includes empty properties.</p> <p>Planning Enforcement can investigate empty properties that are having a detrimental effect on the amenity of the neighbourhood and take action to improve conditions. In the last financial year Planning Enforcement received three complaints in relation to untidy student accommodation.</p> <p>A press release promoting the availability of Partnership Grants was issued earlier this year; this resulted in one valid enquiry which is currently at the quotation stage.</p>
<p>Required Outcomes</p>	<p>The Private Sector Housing Team has a target to bring four long term empty properties back into use in 2015/16. This target is challenging as it is based on previous performance when a dedicated post (the Homelessness Resources Officer) was in place.</p> <p>Reactive work will continue in respect of empty properties that are causing nuisance or providing harbourage for vermin.</p>
<p>Measures to Evaluate Outcomes</p>	<p>The Strategic and Private Sector Housing Key Performance Indicator Framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of Partnership Grants received</li> <li>• Number of Partnership Grants completed</li> <li>• Number of private homes that have been empty for six months or more (Council Tax records)</li> <li>• Number of private homes that have been empty for six months or more where action has been taken to improve the condition of the property for surrounding residents (either reactively or proactively)</li> </ul>

<p>Implications for Customers</p>	<p>The provision of four additional properties in the private rented sector for families in need of accommodation.</p> <p>The minimisation of the impact of remaining empty properties on surrounding neighbourhoods</p>
<p>Alternative Options</p>	<p>The Council can use the following options to bring empty properties back into use:</p> <p><b>Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs)</b></p> <p>Where all other means of encouragement and enforcement measures have failed, or where a property owner cannot be traced, the Council may use its Compulsory Purchase powers to restore an empty property.</p> <p>A Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) is not effective until it has been confirmed by the Secretary of State (SoS) (except for cases where there are no objections, in which case the SoS will write to the authority to advise it can confirm the CPO itself).</p> <p>CPO is perhaps the strongest power available to tackle empty properties in situations where there is a compelling case in the public interest.</p> <p>However a compensation payment may be payable to the ex-owner in some circumstances.</p> <p><b>Empty Dwellings Management Orders (EDMOs)</b></p> <p>An Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) allows the authority to take over management of an empty property - effectively enabling a local authority to step into the shoes of the owner and manage the property. EDMOs should be considered as tools to be used as a last resort, where all other interventions have been considered and rejected.</p> <p>For EDMO provisions to apply, the property must have been empty for at least two years and must be causing a nuisance and blighting the local community.</p> <p>There are two types of EDMO - an Interim Measure (IMO) designed to provide time for a longer term solution to be found. An IMO may last up to twelve months. Where an IMO is ending and a solution cannot be found, the authority may then seek a Final Management Order (FMO). A FMO can last up to seven, fourteen or twenty one years.</p> <p>If an EDMO is granted by a Residential Property Tribunal, the Council will renovate the property to bring it back into use but the owner will still own it. The authority will recoup any costs from the</p>

	<p>rents received when the property is let. Once the authority's expenses have been recouped the owner will receive any incoming rent from the tenant.</p> <p><b>Enforced Sale Procedures</b></p> <p>The Enforced Sale Procedure is a power given under the Law of Property Act 1925 (section 103). It can be used in conjunction with 'Works in Default' where notices have been served on owners insisting that works be done. If these are ignored, then the Council has the right to carry out the work in default of the notice served.</p> <p>However, Enforced Sale can only be utilised to recover the 'debt' where there is an outstanding 'priority' debt charge in favour of the Council.</p>
Emerging Issues	<p>From a recent walk around of the Houses in Multiple Occupation in the student areas of the Borough sixteen properties have been identified as empty. The Private Sector Team will be making contact with the landlords to establish why the properties are now empty and what their intention is for the future use of the properties.</p> <p>Anecdotally, an increase in empty student properties has not been recorded by Planning Services, however an increase in the number of larger student houses being under-occupied, by smaller student groups, has.</p> <p>There is no provision at the present time for a C4 use class order to be suspended to allow a different use for a period of time, without the need for a new application upon reverting to C4 use.</p>
Timetable/Future Events	<p>It is proposed that we continue with existing Private Sector Housing staffing resources and a reviewed approach to returning empty properties back into use, incorporating the use of CPOs.</p> <p>We would need to make capital provision on a case by case basis for the selective use of CPOs, which would include external support from specialist organisations e.g. NPLaw.</p>
Cost and Staff Requirements	<p>Using existing resources, and where a third party is prepared to enter into an indemnity or <i>back to back</i> agreement, it is estimated that a budget of £20,000 - £30,000 should be sufficient to cover the non-recoverable CPO costs (administrative and legal costs, basic loss and disturbance payment (compensation) and surveyors fees), per property. In some cases only a small part of this budget will be used (e.g. if there are no objections and the basic loss payment is avoided because of service of a statutory notice).</p>
Risks	<p>If the SoS does not confirm the CPO following an objection, the</p>

	Council must pay the objector's costs.																
Additional Information	<p>Partnership Grants</p> <p>The Partnership Grant is intended to assist owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.</p> <p>The Housing Act 2004 contains provisions for local authorities to deal with long term empty properties in the private sector. EDMO can be issued by the Council to take control of empty properties with a view to securing their occupation. The preferred view of the Government and Charnwood Borough Council is that the re-use of a property wherever possible should be voluntary. This grant will enable owners to bring empty properties to the decent home standard and back in to use.</p> <p>All applicants must be over eighteen. The grant is subject to detailed conditions and definitions and is awarded on a discretionary basis. Please refer to the full policy or contact us on the number below.</p> <p>Qualifying Criteria:</p> <p>To qualify for grant assistance, the property must have been empty for six months or more. The applicant may be required to enter in to a nomination rights agreement for up to five years with the Council.</p> <p>Conditions and Grant Amount:</p> <p>The applicant will provide estimates for all work required. The grant awarded will be for 50% of the eligible costs up to a maximum of £15,000. The full grant must be repaid if the property is not let or available for letting in accordance with the table below after the completion of works.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="528 1458 1385 1854"> <thead> <tr> <th>Value of Partnership Grant Awarded</th> <th>Nomination Rights period</th> <th>Available for private renting (years)</th> <th>Total number of years property available for letting</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Up to £5,000</td> <td>0</td> <td>2*</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£5,001 - £10,000</td> <td>2</td> <td>1*</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£10,001 - £15,000</td> <td>3</td> <td>2*</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>*If the property is not let for a period of 6 months during this time, then the nomination rights agreement would recommence.</p>	Value of Partnership Grant Awarded	Nomination Rights period	Available for private renting (years)	Total number of years property available for letting	Up to £5,000	0	2*	2	£5,001 - £10,000	2	1*	3	£10,001 - £15,000	3	2*	5
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£10,001 - £15,000	3	2*	5														

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

## Report Tracker – 27 September 2016

Report Title	Date due to O&S	Head of Service/ Report Author	Lead O&S Member / Taskgroup	Scope of what is to be scrutinised	Further details / current position
Quarter 1 2016/17 Performance Report	September 2016	Policy and Performance		Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision-making; key performance data; the wider borough picture.	Cabinet requirement
Raising the Profile and Awareness of Scrutiny and Increasing its Influence and Impact	September 2016	Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer		Methods to heighten the profile, influence and impact of Scrutiny and increase public engagement	
Water supply and waste water disposal	October 2016			Southern Water to be asked to attend on adoption of private sewers.	
<b><i>Budget Scrutiny Process to be carried out November-January</i></b>					
Community Safety Partnership Annual Update	February 2017	Health, Parking & Community Safety		Presents the latest strategic assessment information that informs CSP priorities, and the work carried out by partners during 2016/17. Members are invited to ask questions about any aspect of the Community Safety Partnership.	Statutory requirement as part of Crime & Disorder Partnership
Safeguarding	March 2017	Health, Parking & Community Safety			Requested by Cabinet as part of a revised policy

Report Title	Date due to O&S	Head of Service/ Report Author	Lead O&S Member / Taskgroup	Scope of what is to be scrutinised	Further details / current position
Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group on Universal Credit	Post-April 2017	Head of Housing		The O&S Committee wishes to have an update report on the roll out of Universal Credit.	
Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report	May 2017	Policy and Performance		The Council's Constitution requires the O&S Committee to make an annual report to full Council.	Statutory requirement

## Other Items

Report Title	Date due to O&S	Head of Service/ Report Author	Lead O&S Member / Taskgroup	Scope of what is to be scrutinised	Further details / current position
Local Councils, Public Health and Social Care					
Stour Centre Refurbishment		Head of Culture			

## Suggested topics for future review

Topic suggestion	Committee Flowchart Assessment to be carried out
Developing Infrastructure to support Ashford's growth	27.09.16
Community Integration	27.09.16
Drug use in Ashford	27.09.16
Education provision and resourcing in the Borough	27.09.16
Ashford's wellbeing focus	27.09.16

## Overview and Scrutiny - Topic Selection assessment

Topic under consideration.....

**1. Does the topic represent a key issue for local people and is it likely to result in improvements for local people?**

		Yes
		No

**2. Is the issue strategic and significant?**

		Yes
		No

**3. Does the topic fall within a Community or Corporate priority area?**

		Yes
		No

**4. Is it likely to lead to effective outcomes?**

		Yes
		No

*Stage 1 (validity) assessment - **reject** any topic with a 'No' response to any of questions 1 to 4.*

**5. Will scrutiny involvement be duplicating some other work?**

		Yes
		No

*Stage 2 (validity) assessment - **reject** any topic with a 'Yes' response to question 5*

**6. Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?**

		Yes
		No

**7. Is it an issue of community concern or is there a high level of dissatisfaction with the service?**

		Yes
		No

**8. Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?**

		Yes
		No

**9. Is the scrutiny activity timely?**

		Yes
		No

### **Stage 3 (priority) assessment**

*Topics with a 'No' response to any of questions 6 to 9 should be deemed **LOW PRIORITY***

*Topics with a 'Yes' response to all of questions 6 to 9 should be deemed **HIGH PRIORITY***

