



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in Committee Room No. 2 (Bad Münstereifel Room), Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL on **Tuesday, 14th June, 2022 at 7.00pm.**

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Barrett, Blanford, Brooks, Burgess, Farrell, Hayward, Howard-Smith, Ledger, Meaden, Mulholland.

Agenda

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1. Apologies/Substitutes	
To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c)	
2. Declarations of Interest	1 - 2
To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document:	
a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)	
b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)	
c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests	
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3. Minutes - 10th May 2022	3 - 6
To approve the Minutes of the last Meeting	
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6 June 2022

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Agenda Item 2

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 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 alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents’ groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, 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: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

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/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council’s Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **10th May 2022**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);

Cllrs. Blanford, Burgess, Howard-Smith, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland.

Apologies:

Cllr. Chilton, Farrell, Hayward, Meaden.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Harman (remotely), Hayward, Wright.

In attendance:

Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Member Services Officer (remotely).

Director of Place, Space and Leisure; Spatial Planning Manager; Team Leader, Plan Making and Infrastructure; Policy & Scrutiny Officer.

390 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 8th March 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

391 S106 Task Group - Recommendations Update Report

The Team Leader, Plan Making and Infrastructure introduced this item and explained that this was a six monthly update following the approval of the recommendations by Cabinet in November 2021.

He went onto explain that responding to the Task Group's recommendations and the actions arising from the Mid-Kent Audit of the S106 process were the main areas of focus starting with organising the process mapping exercise and leading to the production of a Supplementary Planning Document later this year. He referred to Table 1, which listed the progress made against each of the recommendations.

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- The Chairman mentioned the Consolidated Infrastructure Levy and the uncertainty around the changes proposed by central Government. He added that until such time that changes were confirmed there was no benefit from discussing it at the meeting. He went on to ask what constructive work was in

progress on the process mapping exercise, and it was explained that Officers had been reviewing other models of process mapping, discussing with internal and external colleagues involved and had been in contact with Parish Councils to gain understanding of their knowledge of S106 processes. The Chairman asked when the Committee could expect a meaningful update on the process mapping exercise. The Spatial Planning Manager explained that resources had to be balanced with other urgent priorities, for example, finding a strategic solution to the Stodmarsh issue. He said that ensuring the right internal and external processes were in place, including the types of infrastructure being sought would be key. Officers anticipated having a draft S106 Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) ready for consultation by the end of the year, so working back from that, a further update to the Committee in the Autumn would be justified. The Chairman acknowledged that there were other pressures, but asked that the Committee receive the next update in six months' time.

- A Member asked whether S106 projects were on hold whilst the Government review was underway. The Spatial Planning Manager confirmed that this was not the case, and so long as the project fulfilled all the requirements then the funds would be released. However, the caveat to that would be that the provider delivering the project might be unable to fulfil their ability to undertake the work.
- In response to a question, the Spatial Planning Manager advised that Parish Councils would be an active stakeholder in the consultation process and developing a narrative with them was expected to increase their understanding.
- There was some discussion regarding Stodmarsh and the impact the constraints would have on planning developments. It was possible that in some circumstances, the viability of the whole site would need to be reviewed, but that was undetermined at this point. In comparison to other Local Authorities, Ashford Borough Council collected a larger amount of S106 monies and it would be interesting to see what the Government decided in terms of a new Infrastructure Levy. The Chairman reiterated that the first recommendation of the Task Group was to carry out the process mapping exercise before the remaining recommendations could be addressed and therefore this task should be prioritised before considering improvements to the current arrangements. Any changes to the way in which developer contributions were managed in future would be considered later down the line.
- A Member spoke about the perception within Parish Councils that the S106 funding was slowing and being faded out. The Spatial Planning Manager confirmed that nothing had changed and the S106 process remained the same. A further question was asked about when there would be more Member training, as only one training session had been arranged so far and this was offered during office hours. It was confirmed that more training could be arranged and the slides and guidance notes would be made available to Members. It was felt that further down the process training would be beneficial, as it would incorporate more work on the Task Group recommendations. The training session that had already taken place had

been recorded and made available on YouTube for others to watch.

- The Spatial Planning Manager advised that it would not be justified to request applicants in areas outside of the Stodmarsh catchment to contribute towards mitigation costs. The Chairman expressed an opinion that the developer should be responsible for mitigating nutrient neutrality, although the Council had taken the responsibility to provide a solution in the form of a strategic wetland mitigation scheme.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

392 Membership for the Consultation and Engagement Task Group

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer explained that this topic had been delayed owing to the pandemic, but was now at a stage to commence. She asked for volunteers to join the Task Group and confirmed that the meetings would be held virtually on Teams. The purpose was to review the Council's involvement and engagement with the public, to look at the consultation process on corporate issues, in response to criticism the Council had previously received.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted, and Councillors wishing to volunteer contact the Policy and Scrutiny Officer or the Chairman.

393 Future Reviews Tracker

The Director of Place, Space and Leisure explained that the Service was due to have an audit in July, and therefore requested that the Freedom Leisure Contract be deferred from July's meeting to later in the year. The Chairman agreed.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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Agenda Item 4

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW SCOPING – CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Review Topic	Consultation and Engagement
Chairman	Cllr N Ovenden
Group Membership	Cllrs Ovenden, Ledger and Blanford
Lead Officer (project manager)	Abi Moffatt, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Officer Group Core	Charlotte Hammersley, Will Race, Michelle Pecci, Dean Spurrell
Wider Officer Group	James Sloan
Outline purpose of Review	The council is continually reviewing the ways it communicates and consults with residents over current issues, new policies and projects. Members felt it would be useful to understand the methods used currently, the challenges and compare best practice with other bodies.
Aims for the Review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What methods of engagement and communication are used by council services and could they be improved to engage with hard to reach groups? 2. How is the council engaging with hard to reach groups in the Borough and what are the obstacles. 3. To understand the council’s public consultation process and how this contributes to decision making. 4. To explore best practice and the tools used by other Local Authorities to carry out public consultations. 5. Identify ways that Overview and Scrutiny could engage more with residents to increase public participation at Committee meetings.
Background	<p>Following the approval of the Committee’s work plan at the O&S Committee meeting, Members wished to form a Task Group to review how the council consults and engages with residents in the Borough.</p> <p><u>What is Consultation and Engagement?</u></p> <p>Public Consultation can be defined as “the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views with the</p>

	<p>objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of actions”¹</p> <p>Engagement on the other hand is more informal and centres on, "developing and sustaining working relationships to help public bodies and communities understand and act on the needs or issues the community experiences”</p>
Methodology	Witness sessions and research
Possible witnesses (for written or oral evidence) e.g. Council officers, individual residents, community groups, partner organisations, other interested stakeholders, other external organisations, executive members	<p>Tunbridge Wells BC</p> <p>Other public bodies who use alternative consultation software</p> <p>Dean Spurrell, Communications and Marketing Manager</p> <p>Charlotte Hammersley, Head of Policy and Performance</p> <p>Centre for Governance and Scrutiny</p>
Documents to be considered	<p>LGA – Comms Hub – Communications support</p> <p>Dover District Council Consultation Toolkit</p> <p>LGA: New Conversations LGA Guide to engagement.</p>
Expected Outcomes	A focused report recommended by the O&S Committee to the Cabinet that identifies ways that the council engages and consults residents on various topics, and recommend any improvements.
Risks	The topic can be related to many services and so there is a risk of not being focused if the scope is not refined.
What will be excluded	<p>Planning consultations (except where relevant to consultation software)</p> <p>Engagement with Parish Councils</p> <p>Communication with local business</p> <p>Internal Communications</p>
Potential Visits	Possibly to other council
Expected Timescale	6 months but this can be extended if required. 2 or 3 evidence gathering sessions
Project Start Date:	June 2022
June Committee meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise and agree scope.

¹ The Consultation Institute: The Consultation Charter 2004

<p>Meeting 1 - June</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How consultations work in the council currently. Residents survey – results and online approach for this year. • Report on consultation tools – Bang the Table, Citizens Space, Hello Lamp Post • Good practice – potential witness session with Tunbridge Wells. • Evidence from Services on consultation needs.
<p>Meeting 2 – July</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview from the Communications Team – Engage on Social Media/Magazine/Website. • Discussion on participation at Committee meetings and engaging residents with scrutiny process.
<p>Meeting 3– Late July/Early August</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap Up

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Agenda Item No:

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 14th June 2022
Thursday 30th June 2022

Report Title: The Ashford Borough Council Annual Performance Report
2021/22

Report Author: Tom Swain
Job Title: Governance and Data Protection Officer

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Gerry Clarkson, Leader of the Council

Summary: The presenting of an Annual Performance Report is an important pillar of the council's transparency agenda.

The Annual Performance Report:

- Looks at the achievements and milestones the council has realised over the year in the context of the Recovery Plan 2020-2022.
- Summarise performance against the council's suite of key performance indicators (KPI's) for the year 2021-2022.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the contents of the Annual Performance Report and approve its publication on the council's website.**

Policy Overview: The Annual Performance Report offers another means by which the council can embrace the transparency agenda and provide a reflection on the performance and achievements of the previous financial year.

Financial Implications: None

Legal Implications: None

Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not required as the Annual Performance Report is a record of past performance and does not propose new action for the council.
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	Not required
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	Not required
Sustainability Implications:	None
Other Material Implications:	None
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	Recovery Plan 2020-2022
Contact:	Tom.swain@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330432

Ashford Borough Council

Annual Performance Report

2021-2022

DRAFT

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Message from the Leader Cllr Clarkson



The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on every aspect of our lives, as well as our local communities. Through our Recovery Plan we remained focused on our long term objectives to be a greener, more caring and prosperous borough for everyone, whilst aiding wherever possible with a timely and structured recovery from the economic and social impact of the pandemic.

This annual report reflects on some of the achievements and milestones seen across our borough over the last year. From our commitment to supporting business, opening of revamped leisure facilities, our investment in play areas, ambitious town centre events and fantastic

housing schemes to name but a few, it is clear Ashford has not been frozen by the pandemic.

Looking forward we must now step up to the challenges of climate change and with our best endeavours strive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Our borough, in the heart of the Garden of England, needs us to continue to be bold, innovative and decisive and lead the way to a more sustainable, biodiverse, green future for all who live, work and visit Ashford. We certainly have some exciting prospects to look forward to, with the Ashford International Studios, Brompton's plans and the Creative Hub all sure to shape the borough's future.

Message from the Chief Executive



Our Annual Report offers an opportunity to reflect on some of the good work which has gone on over the last year.

The period has been and continues to be a challenging one, with us all having lived through the challenges and heartbreak of a pandemic, and now all being faced with a cost of living squeeze and continued supply chain disruptions.

Through our forward-thinking entrepreneurial approach, careful planning and working in conjunction with local and regional partners we are committed to continue to offer effective and good value for money services to our residents, whilst supporting a sustained economic, cultural and green recovery.

This year has seen some fantastic achievements with our modernisation programs at East Stour Court and Berry Place, refurbishment of our leisure centres, improvements in our open spaces and continued support for business all being achieved.

I look forward to sharing news of Ashford's continued progress against the New Corporate Plan 2022-24 with you all in future editions of Ashford For You and next year's annual report.

Our Borough in 2021-22

Key Facts and Figures

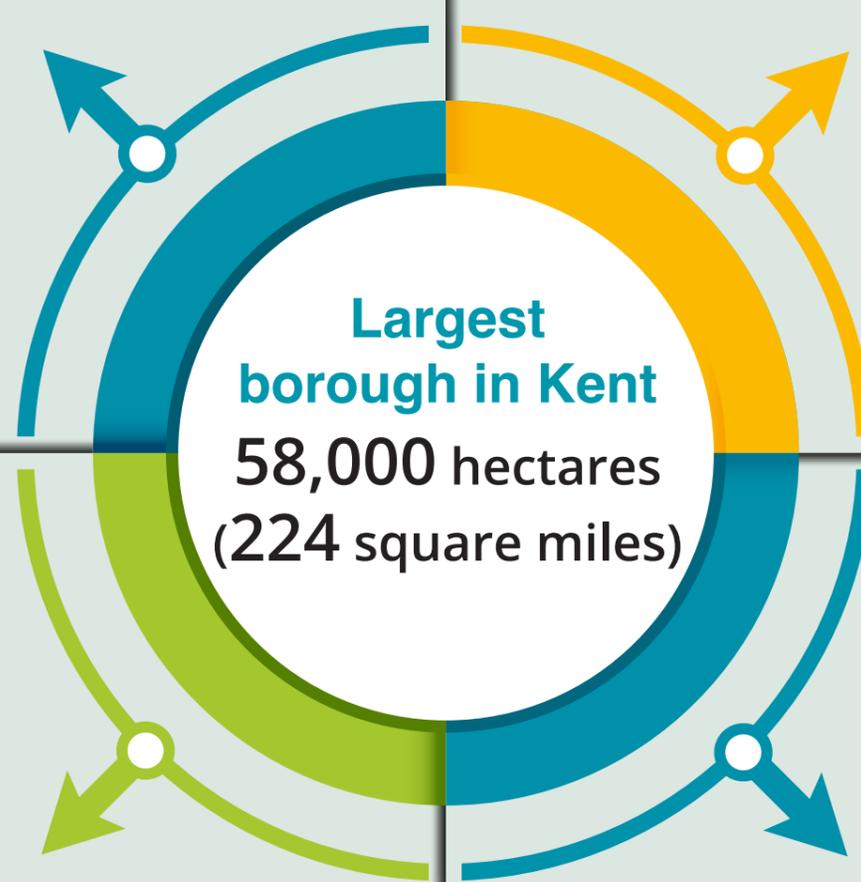
Population estimate in 2020

is **132,420** (6th largest population in Kent exc. Medway)



Population age range

Under 5 (pre-school age)	6.1 %
5 to 19 (school/college age)	18.9%
20 to 64 (working age)	55.5%
65 and over (retirement age)	19.4%



Ethnicity

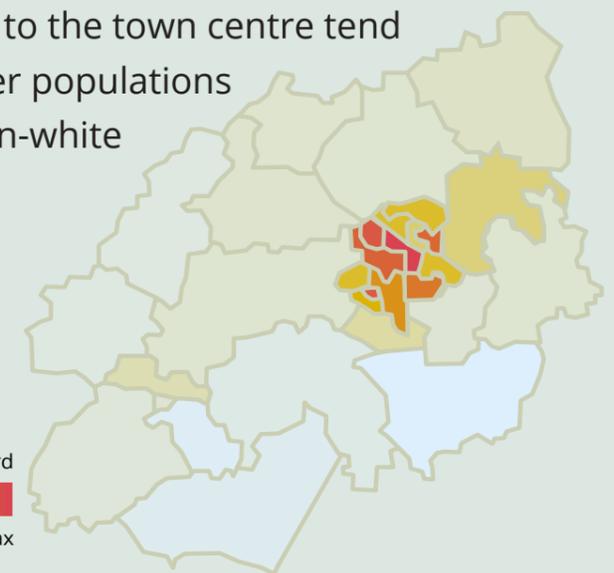
In Ashford **6.3%** of the population are black and ethnic minority, the same percentage as the Kent average. (Census 2011). **91%** of residents were born in the UK.



Ethnicity

Wards closer to the town centre tend to have higher populations of BME or non-white UK residents, compared to rural wards

BME Population (%) by ward
Min Max



Adoption of the Recovery Plan 2020-22

The Recovery Plan 2020-22 provided us with a framework for a timely and structured recovery from the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

This plan set out to deliver a number of actions allowing the council to reconfigure how it worked in order to most effectively deliver services to residents and in collaboration with others, help mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on the local economy, communities and residents.

The underlying principles of this plan were to build back to a greener, more prosperous, resilient and caring borough. This annual report demonstrates how we delivered against the plan during 2021-22.



Our Recovery Plan 2020 - 22

The Ashford Ambition: to be a thriving, productive and inclusive borough in 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.

Recovery Plan Themes



Our Objectives

Carbon reduction; Job creation; Building community resilience; Improving the customer journey; Revitalising the local economy; Promoting health and wellbeing; Tackling inequalities

Our Service Design Principles

This is a framework that guides us when designing services to ensure our services are;

- Efficient • Consistent • Inclusive
- Improve the customer experience

Green principles



- 1 All investment to support recovery and future growth should have low or zero carbon emissions, use resources efficiently and aim for environmental net gain.
- 2 Employees and residents are supported to protect and enhance their wellbeing through a cleaner environment and more access to rich and varied nature.
- 3 Communities are well connected both digitally, and through an effective network of footpaths, cycleways and public transport.
- 4 Future development and existing communities are resilient and adapted to the changing climate and severe weather events
- 5 Biodiversity is protected, restored and created; nature-based solutions are considered first and invested in at every opportunity.
- 6 Ensure any green recovery solutions are equitable and fair; a green and equitable recovery go hand in hand.
- 7 Greater partnership working and collaboration.



Equalities Objectives

These are refreshed every four years to ensure the council has due regard to; eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations



Improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do



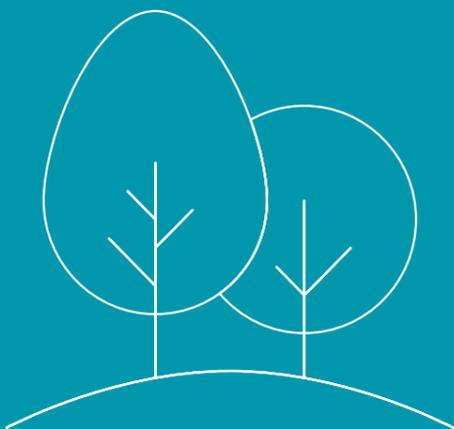
Encourage all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities



Deliver services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents



Deliver organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce



Supporting Economic Recovery

Covid business support continued

During the period we continued to support the businesses in the borough both through the administration of additional Covid support funds and the Ashford Town Centre Support Grants.

In December 2021, the Chancellor announced that new Covid grant funding would be made available to help businesses in the leisure and hospitality sectors, made up of the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grants, and the Additional Restrictions Grant. In total, the Omicron Hospitality & Leisure Grant was paid out to 396 businesses totalling £1,336,750 support, and the Additional Restrictions Grant to 14 businesses totalling £241,019 of support.

Additionally, we launched the Town Centre Support Grant. This grants scheme, which ran from October to December, was designed to support businesses to improve the visual appearance of Ashford Town Centre and to support them to improve their premises or attract investment into empty units.

The Ashford Town Centre Support Grants were made up of two grant streams:

The Shop Improvement Grant, a grant of up to £3,000 for a business that could demonstrate they were due to undertake needed improvements to their premises in the town centre, and the Empty Premises Grant, a grant of up to £10,000 for a business that could demonstrate they were bringing a unit in the town centre back into use and needed support for the refurbishment.

This grant programme was financed from Ashford's remaining share of the Government's Additional Restrictions Grants.

Specialist business support programme for town centre businesses

A tailored programme of specialist business support was launched to help Ashford and Tenterden based businesses across the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors to develop and capitalise on opportunities that COVID-19 had presented.

The Ashford and Tenterden targeted programme was launched in partnership with Loveashford in May 2021 and will run for an initial period of 18 months to offer tailored support to a select number of eligible businesses across both town centres on a limited basis.

The specialist support available aimed to help businesses in a range of areas, including improving digital presence, merchandising, product development and business resilience, as well as the adoption and application to digital platforms that enable them to trade online. Help was also made available to businesses in the form of assistance accessing finance and funding, building successful sales and marketing strategies and cash flow management.

Council takes over NCP car park in Park Mall

The council took ownership of the former NCP car park at Park Mall shopping centre in Ashford Town Centre, and announced it will become one of their portfolio of town centre car parks, meaning residents will not have to pay as much to use it as before.

It will remain closed initially while necessary repair works are carried out to address the problems experienced by some of the tenants in Park Mall. Once completed, the car park will be re-open again for public use.





Funding boost for Ashford International Studios at Newtown Works

We warmly welcomed the Government's decision to award £14,773,745 of Levelling Up Funding for the Ashford International Studios, Newtown Works project.

The council submitted the bid in June 2021, identified as one of the borough's strategically important projects in our draft Corporate Plan 2022-24. Our bid was supported by Damian Green MP, alongside the partners of the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board. Support also came from SELEP, Kent Film Office, KICC, Screen South and the EKC Group.

The planning application for the site was fully permitted in September 2020. The developer Quinn Estates is working with the council, alongside potential operators for the studios as well as with the East Kent College Group to bring forward the studio space and new educational facility.



Ashford chosen in Brompton's plan to build revolutionary bicycle factory of the future

Brompton, the UK's largest bicycle manufacturer, has taken the first step towards creating a revolutionary new factory in Ashford, by announcing its intention to submit a planning application for the development.

In order to support global demand, as cities move away from car culture to healthier walking and cycling strategies, Brompton have set their sights on a new home, situated between leading cycling cities of London and Paris. The factory, which is being supported in principle by Ashford Borough Council, will enable Brompton's future growth ambitions as they continue to transform the way that people move in cities around the world.

The new factory will be constructed on a floodplain, which will provide an opportunity to restore the wetland and promote walking and cycling for the local community in this unique, natural setting in the heart of Ashford. The innovative scheme will house a world class production facility and will become the Brompton Global Headquarters and, by 2027, the company expects to employ over 1,500 staff.

Once fully operational, the proposed development will result in around 4,000 jobs being supported locally, including supply chain jobs, jobs supported by the spending of staff and the factory operation itself.

Brompton will partner with Ashford Borough Council and Quinn Estates to bring the vision to life, investing in the local community through the creation of a skilled workforce, as well as using the museum and educational space on the site to facilitate outreach with local schools and universities.



Supporting Community Recovery



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New facilities open at Waterside

During the period, work has been completed on new facilities at Waterside Sports and Children's Centre.

The new building will be leased to Bromley Green FC, who currently operate out of the site in Turner Close, Ashford. The facilities include a lobby area, four football changing rooms and officials' changing room, a fully accessible changing room and accessible toilet, as well as a social area including a kitchen.

Funding for the project came from the Football Foundation, Ashford Borough Council and Bromley Green FC.

Creative hub takes shape

One of Kent's largest cultural infrastructure projects has achieved a major milestone in the development process during the period.

Jasmin Vardimon Company's new and much anticipated creative hub takes shape, promising a state-of-the-art facility for the internationally renowned dance company to expand its activities locally, nationally and on the global stage.

Construction work on the 13,530 sq ft site started in January and rapid progress has been made with the building's structural skeleton now complete. The building will include space for the creation of the company's touring productions and rehearsals, dedicated studios to accommodate the rapid growth of the company's acclaimed educational programmes and community classes, plus incubator space for small creative businesses.

The primary creation space will also be available to hire by external creative companies, offering studio space, fully sprung dance floor and full lighting, sound and AV rig. A new café and meeting rooms will also be available providing flexible spaces for the local community to get together.

The building will form the centre of a major new arts hub in Ashford, with a number of light industrial units formed over 47,163 sq ft for sale and/or lease to attract both creative businesses as well as the general market within the new cultural quarter.

In order to deliver the facility, capital investment has been secured from Arts Council England, the Cultural Recovery Fund's Capital Kickstart Fund, Ashford Borough Council from the Business Rates Retention Pilot and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership's Getting Building Fund.



British Cycling bid success

The Victoria Park Project has been successful in its bid to the British Cycling 'Places to Ride' fund, which means existing plans in the park for a bike dirt track will be upgraded to a pump track.

Delivered through a unique partnership between British Cycling, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and Sport England, the Places to Ride programme has made £15 million available to ensure a lasting legacy in England from the 2019 UCI Road World Championships. The championships took place in Yorkshire in September 2019.

Thanks to the success of our bid, as well as funding from the Department of Transport, the project will now be able to make the following improvements in Victoria Park:

- Mock road markings for a dedicated learn-to-ride space
- New cycle stands around the park
- Seating/viewing space near the pump track
- 100m "sprint" track markings
- Research into and celebration of the local heritage surrounding "Norman Nippies"
- Consultation with local young people in the design of the pump track
- Aspirations for a "Go-ride" club, a "Breeze" ride group, and engagement programmes for schools, home-schooling groups and local BAME and LGBTQ+ communities
- Plans for regular "Ripper" time trials for 4-11 year-olds, "Cyclo-cross" events for 9-16 year olds, and Pump Track Races run by British Cycling

The pump track will provide a space for youth recreation in the park. It is the project's hope that they will use this space alongside younger children and adults who share an interest in cycling, creating an opportunity for intergenerational skill and hobby sharing in the community.

Community Project Hub comes to Victoria Park

A further exciting development in the Victoria Park project was the installation of a new Community Project Hub. A converted shipping container, the hub will be used to host activities, support events and share information on the project, and is situated between the fountain and the car park.

The hub is just part of a number of developments and improvements to the park, many of which will begin this year and include a new children's play area, improved access to the river, refurbished hub building including a proposed café and community space, and more.

The project to revamp the park is progressing following a grant of more than £3m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. This has been enhanced by funding from a mixture of section 106 contributions from local developments, and direct funding from Ashford Borough Council.

Investing in Play – three new play areas part of £1.1m investment

Three play areas in the borough are going to benefit from a £1.1 million council investment, following Cabinet approval this year.

Rylands Road, Bybrook; Central Park, Bluebell Road, Park Farm; and Spearpoint Recreation Ground, Kennington, will all be upgraded, benefiting over 4,600 households living within walking distance of these play areas.

A capital Play Regeneration Programme has been agreed alongside a Repairs and Renewals Programme to safeguard appropriate play spaces and facilitate opportunities for ongoing improvement.

We own 55 play areas across the borough with 54 managed and maintained by Aspire Landscape Management and one managed through a lease agreement with a parish council.

The Play Regeneration Programme of £1.1m focuses on three key sites where the play provision is particularly in poor condition and requires major refurbishment.

The new-look Stour Centre opened

The new-look Stour Centre officially opened as a £7.5m investment was unveiled. The major refurbishment included: a refurbished gym with new equipment, a new soft play and clip and climb centre, an additional exercise studio, improved changing rooms and revamped reception and café area.

The centre's refurbishment now provides residents and visitors new additional facilities including a new multi-level soft-play area and a clip 'n' climb interactive climbing wall that the whole family can enjoy.

Visitors are able to relax, unwind and socialise in the new café serving a wide selection of refreshments including the well-known high street brand – Costa Coffee.

In addition The Stour Centre offers 'best in class' health and wellbeing activities and facilities with a fully refurbished gym with all the very latest equipment, including a new BIOCIRCUIT room, which is one of only six in the whole of the UK, and a full programme of group exercise classes including indoor cycling.

New fitness facilities at Julie Rose Stadium now available

Following the opening of The Stour Centre Gym in June, it was Julie Rose Stadium's turn to get a fabulous new makeover all thanks to the continuing investment in the local leisure facilities by Ashford Borough Council.

The new gym occupies the previously named Colin Jackson suite that was traditionally used for meetings and small group exercise classes but the space has undergone a huge facelift with new flooring, redecoration and a whole new look and feel with still those jaw dropping views over the athletics track.

The new gym space is packed with all the latest gym equipment supplied by world renowned equipment manufacturer Technogym which is the same equipment that has recently been installed at the nearby Stour Centre to some acclaim.

Along with the opening of these fabulous new fitness facilities at the stadium, Freedom Leisure and Ashford Borough Council are working on plans to re-surface the outdoor athletics track.

Loveashford continues its town centre's events with events including:

Ashford Banners; A Story of Community Strength, local artists collaborated with community groups across the borough to lead a series of banner making workshops, the results of which created a woven wonderland of beautiful artwork across the town centre.

The banners created an artistic walking trail across the town centre; the collection of never-seen-before, hand-made artwork, proudly showcases the borough's community spirit and created a positive and uplifting atmosphere throughout the town.

The Fabric of Ashford; an inspiring art installation created by and for the local Ashford community. In partnership with London-based event company Emergency Exit Arts, Loveashford was delighted to host The Fabric of Ashford, a community co-creation art project which saw the bandstand beautifully decorated with colourful fabric squares, created and designed by the local community.

Ice to see you; Sideways PR along with Loveashford, Experience Ashford and Tenterden and Ashford Borough Council, created an ice cream trail to the region.

The trail was a part of a larger 'Welcome Back' government funded campaign that focused on the importance of recognising, reviving and regenerating our high streets, following the impact of coronavirus.

And the build up to Christmas saw a return of the spectacular Carnival of the Baubles lighting up Ashford town centre in December.

Loveashford, in conjunction with Ashford Borough Council and in partnership with Emergency Exit Arts, Made in Ashford and a host of talented local artists welcomed the Carnival of the Baubles back to our high street.

Themed around disco and dancing, this year's parade hosted a special appearance from Emergency Exit Art's Disco Turtle – a giant mechanical puppet that led the procession full of glitter and light through the town, accompanied by the best disco tunes.

The disco vibes continued into the evening with a family-friendly disco party on the bandstand hosted by Ashford College students.



Place Making, Regeneration and Infrastructure



Infinity Ashford set to transform the skyline of Ashford with 16-storey residential development

Ambitious plans to build a landmark high quality residential development on a prominent brownfield site in Ashford opposite the international railway station, and featuring one of the tallest buildings in Kent, were approved.

To mark the granting of permission by the council's Planning Committee, the developer has announced that the scheme has been called Infinity Ashford, in honour of John Wallis, who was born and raised in Ashford before becoming one of the world's most eminent mathematicians, and best known for his pioneering work into infinity.

The 216 homes comprises 207 apartments and nine riverside townhouses, plus three commercial units on the ground floor in Beaver Road.

Developer, A Better Choice for Property Ltd, says a two year build time is expected for Infinity Ashford before the units are available for occupation. It bought the land from the Southern Housing Group in 2019. The site was cleared last year ready for work to start after HomePlus Furniture moved to alternative premises in the town centre.

ABC for Property is an independent private limited residential investment/development company wholly owned by and funded through Ashford Borough Council. It has been tasked with building a private market rental portfolio of up to 500 properties which will not only provide 'A Better Choice for Property' for its working tenants but also a significant alternative revenue stream to the Council.



Ashford Borough Council to acquire homes on Chilmington Green development

We moved a step closer to acquiring a small residential stake in the fast-growing Chilmington Green development for £1.97m.

Described as 'a golden opportunity', Cabinet members were told in a recent meeting that the site is known as Parcel 'P' at Chilmington and 10 homes there will be part of the section 106 agreement.

The report added that it will involve working with a reputable developer – Jarvis Homes – from whom the council has previously secured quality homes for affordable housing.

In October 2019, in endorsing the council's affordable housing delivery plan, Cabinet members agreed that the housing team could intervene in the market and acquire s106 homes delivered through the planning system if no registered providers (RPs) were in a position to do so.



Keyworkers prioritised for Somerset Heights and Stour Heights launch in Ashford

We officially opened Somerset Heights and Stour Heights comprising 109 quality apartments in the heart of Ashford town centre.

A large proportion of the lettings were allocated to keyworkers, honouring a pledge made when the authority acquired the homes from developer Dukelease.

When the council announced the deal to buy the New Quarter, as it was then called, the £18.5m investment represented the largest ever handover of general needs accommodation to be managed on one site by the council.

The mix of one and two-bedroom open-plan apartments are contained in two blocks built either side of the Panorama building. Stour Heights has 65 homes over five floors and Somerset Heights is split over three floors with 44 homes.





Ashford Borough Council opens £7.1m East Stour Court

A landmark in Ashford Borough Council's multi-million pound modernisation plan for its sheltered housing schemes saw the re-opening of the £7.1m East Stour Court scheme in Ashford.

Located at Mabledon Avenue, the new-look East Stour Court provides 29 homes for affordable rent for older people, comprising 24 one bedroom and five two-bedroom apartments, built to a high quality that are care ready.

It is modelled on the multi-award-winning Farrow Court independent living scheme developed in south Ashford and the Danemore scheme, which was officially opened in Tenterden by HRH The Princess Royal in early 2020.



Ashford Borough Council opens the independent living scheme Berry Place

Ashford Borough Council's multi-million pound modernisation plan for its independent living schemes, rolled out under its Dahlia brand, has reached another landmark, with the completion of the £7.9m Berry Place scheme (formerly The Poplars).

Located in Beaver Lane in south Ashford, the new-look Berry Place provides 31 homes for affordable rent for older people, comprising 15 one bedroom and 16 two-bedroom apartments, built to a high quality that are care ready. This means that residents should not have to move if faced with deteriorating health in later life.

The stunning development has replaced an outdated scheme at The Poplars and will provide exceptional homes for the new tenants. Work started in February 2020 and was completed, with a clear focus on high energy efficiency design and build.



Changing Places and changing lives

The Council has pledged to lead the way in ensuring the provision of fully accessible toilets for those with disabilities and special needs.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), has allocated £160,000 to support the installation of Changing Places toilets at the Julie Rose Stadium, Victoria Park community hub, Elwick Place in the Macknade's units and the former Odeon building.

They will join those already on offer at the One You shop in Park Mall, Coachworks in Dover Place, The Stour Centre, the Designer Outlet and Ashford Gateway Plus.

Disabled lavatories with a changing bench, hoist, privacy screen and space for two carers are the only facilities that qualify as fully accessible Changing Places toilets, which meet the needs of people with complex care.



Organisational Change and Workforce Development

Carbon neutral plan approved

The Cabinet approved for consultation the draft carbon neutral action plan. The plan supports the aim to achieve carbon neutrality within the council's own estate and operations by 2030 and emphasises the need for the whole community's involvement in achieving Ashford wide carbon neutrality before 2050.

Eight priority areas feature in the plan, focusing not just on how the council can improve sustainability and achieve net zero carbon in our own operations, but also how we can encourage and enable all of Ashford to join us on this journey.

Each priority has a series of objectives and actions that the council will be consulting on over the coming months. The community will play a vital role in achieving carbon neutrality in the borough. We want to ensure we create an action plan that everyone feels they can be part of.

Page 23

Wetland scheme to mitigate effects of new housing developments

The first steps to mitigating the issue of water quality degradation at Stodmarsh Lakes, which has impacted new housing development in the Ashford borough, is set to start with the Cabinet agreeing that land acquisition options for new wetland areas should now be explored and pursued as a matter of urgency.

In July 2020, Natural England (NE) issued Advice to the council requiring new housing development (and other overnight accommodation) in the Stour Catchment to demonstrate 'nutrient neutrality'.

Since the Advice was issued the Council have been unable to grant planning permission for new housing within the Stour Catchment, unless the proposal can show it can achieve 'nutrient neutrality' (a particular issue for small-scale housing proposals).

New wetlands will provide the opportunity to generate nitrogen and phosphorus "credits" which can then be applied to development proposals (current and future) to achieve 'nutrient neutrality'. Similar credit-based schemes are already in place in the Solent region.

Council sets out priorities to 2024

After having to initially pause the development of our Corporate Plan to focus on our Recovery Plan, we were able to return to setting out our ambitions for the short and longer term through the adoption of the Corporate Plan 2022-24.

The work that informed the Ashford Ambition Report, together with a review of the Recovery Plan, has shaped the draft Corporate Plan for 2022-2024 and we look forward to updating you on progress against it over the coming year.

Ashford Borough Council to welcome Afghan families fleeing war-torn country

We increased our efforts to meet the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan by announcing our intention to help to re-home more Afghan nationals who have been assisting the British Government and Armed Forces in the war-torn country.

Ashford has a proud track record in coming to the aid of innocent people caught up in international conflicts – around 150 Syrian refugees have resettled in Ashford over the past six years as part of the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Last year the council won a major national award for its work welcoming Syrian families to the county.



Successful Safer Street funding bid for Ashford town centre

Awarded through a bidding process, Ashford town centre received almost £550,000. This provided personal safety equipment, such as drink testing kits and personal alarms, as well as creating safe havens and installing more CCTV.



A digital app has been developed showing safe routes between key locations such as the lower high street and international train station.

The funding is part of the Home Office Safer Streets initiative and complements three similar projects already running in Gillingham, Canterbury and Ramsgate.

Land Mapping Commission created to help protect the Garden of England from "rural sprawl"

The Commission will undertake an independent land mapping exercise that will inform the Council in shaping future strategies, including the continuously evolving Corporate Plan and the Ashford Local Plan.

The Commission will pool the knowledge and expertise of its members in assessing the evidence given in order to strategically map out the Greater Ashford Borough. It will recognise that there is a need to identify suitable locations for well-designed housing, to meet the growing population and to create economic growth to support local communities.

They will endeavour to determine future uses of broad areas in such a way that ensures that rural villages are protected from becoming merged into suburbs of Ashford or "rural sprawl". This work will go on right in the heart of the Garden of England, where the borough is located.

In the town of Ashford, brownfield sites are being used for housing and economic growth, but there has been an effort to retain and create as much green space as possible for its growing urban population to enjoy, especially where there are apartments with little or no garden space. We must continue to do everything we can to ensure that we create and deliver as much urban green space as possible.

Supporting biodiversity and reducing the impact of climate change

We set out how we will increase biodiversity within council owned green spaces by introducing a variety of habitats and varying maintenance regimes.

The creation of more meadows and enhanced Land Management Plans across the borough, will benefit wildlife, improve the wellbeing of our residents by connecting them with nature as well as continuing to maintain our open spaces in a way that promotes a sense of place and space.

Our in-house landscape management service, Aspire, are making some changes to selected areas of land they manage, including introducing areas of uncut grass for meadow creation.

Aspire will produce Land Management Plans for areas, and explore other opportunities for increasing bio-diversity over time, such as ongoing street and urban tree planting, the introduction of wild flower seed to uncut areas and the planting of hedgerows.

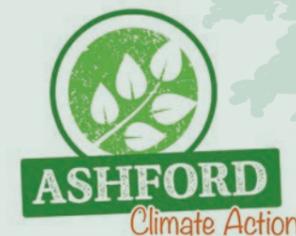


41,000 new trees help boost Kent's climate change initiative

Following the end of climate change summit COP26, a new tree-planting initiative in Kent was announced.

Kent County Council, in partnership with Ashford and Swale Borough Councils, was awarded £275,129 from the Local Authority Treescape Fund for the planting of more than 41,000 trees and saplings across those two areas.

Plantations will be spread across Ashford with a number in the Willesborough and South Ashford areas. Our intention is to plant 135,000 trees over a three-year period – representing one for each resident. This funding will support the project with the first 30,000 going into the ground.



Ashford Borough Council invests £401,000 in solar panels at Carlton Road Business Park

Our Aspire landscape team, responsible for all grounds maintenance across Kent's largest borough, is based at Carlton Road and the solar panels will supply its large depot with both free and carbon neutral electricity, with any surplus sold to the National Grid.

Before approving the investment in the project, the council's Cabinet heard that the installation of the solar array will reduce imported electricity, and will also provide facilities to supply electricity for electric vehicles and plants.

Once the scheme goes live, the amount of carbon dioxide offset is estimated to be 301,322 kg per year; a significant sum which will not only offset the council's footprint, but also help to deliver on the authority's zero carbon ambitions.

Corporate Plan 2022-24



In 2019 we embarked on a comprehensive study to inform our next Corporate Plan, envisaging that this would be developed and adopted during 2020. As our work with stakeholders was coming to a conclusion, the coronavirus pandemic forced the country into lockdown in March 2020. Our Recovery Plan was developed to focus our work towards enabling a timely recovery from the pandemic, supporting residents, communities and local business.

This new Corporate Plan which, going forward, the quarterly performance report and this annual report will be based around, continues this journey and looks ahead, with renewed vigour, to realise the Ashford Ambition that was developed with a wide range of local stakeholders for a vibrant, caring and sustainable borough. The Ashford Ambition is supported by three priority themes:

Green Pioneer – Where businesses, communities, the public and third sector have come together to become carbon neutral, respect the local environment and ecology, and embrace a more sustainable way of living.

• **Caring Ashford** – A caring and supportive place to live, with rich heritage; thriving towns, villages and rural communities; great schools; high-quality housing; a plethora of cultural activities and events; and a strong sense of civic pride.

• **Targeted Growth** – A place where productive, innovative, responsible town and rural business communities offer good quality work to an agile and skilled local workforce who have embraced a culture of lifelong learning.

In realising this ambition we need to continue to work in partnership with others, inspire innovation and creativity and challenge our decisions to ensure we are building a sustainable, carbon neutral future and upholding our values.

Ashford Ambition:

To be a thriving, productive and inclusive borough by 2030 and beyond; a vital part of Kent and the South East where local businesses, social enterprises, communities and the public sector provide collective leadership to promote shared prosperity, happiness and wellbeing.



Theme

Green Pioneer

Our long term aim: Every community and individual plays their part in becoming a carbon neutral borough, through a more sustainable way of life. And the natural environment is protected and enhanced.



Objectives

- GP1: Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets
- GP2: Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable lifestyles
- GP3: Reduce the amount of waste produced from homes and business

Outcomes

- Homes are energy efficient and cheaper to heat. Renewable energy generation and consumption increases. Fewer local car journeys are made, air quality improves and residents are more active and healthy.
- Communities urban and rural areas value, enjoy and respect the natural environment and the abundance of wildlife increases
- A borough free of litter, where everyone takes responsibility for minimising the amount of waste they produce

Caring Ashford

Our long term aim: Towns, villages and rural communities are welcoming, safe places for all who live and work in them, offering a high quality of life where everyone is valued and respected.



- CA1 – Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages and incomes to live sustainably and safely
- CA2 – Local people have access to life-long learning to ensure they have knowledge and skills to take up local employment
- CA3 – Reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people
- CA4 – Communities celebrate their heritage and the diversity of their population to build a more connected community and strengthen social responsibility

- Communities feel safe and secure with easy access to locally-led services designed with communities to meet their needs
- Local people seek positive change for themselves and others through the development of their knowledge and skills, improving social inclusion and employability
- The lives of people with the worst health and wellbeing outcomes are improved
- Cultural activities and events bring communities together, increasing tolerance, respect and understanding

Targeted Growth

Our long term aim: A thriving, productive local economy supporting a range of business and industry offering good work to local people and is recognised as a high quality visitor destination.



- TG1 – Increase productivity and job opportunities and the establishment of sustainable, knowledge based and creative industries in the borough
- TG2 – Enable the improvement of digital infrastructure to support the growing needs of business, voluntary sector and residents
- TG3 – Strengthen local supply chains and increase the resilience of the local economy
- TG4 – Support growth in the visitor economy
- TG5 – Stimulate vibrant, accessible and sustainable Town Centres for residents visitors and business

- The borough attracts and grows businesses and industries that are innovative and sustainable that benefit local employment and incomes
- Fast, reliable digital connectivity is available across the whole borough so no one is disadvantaged in accessing online services or doing business
- Local business survival rates improve
- Ashford is a 'year round' visitor destination renowned for offering quality visitor experiences
- Our town centres are lively, safe places where people of all ages live, work and visit, coming together to enjoy events and activities

Ashford Borough Council is committed to being open and transparent and we follow the code of recommended practice for local authorities on data transparency. As well as our performance reports we produce a number of monitoring reports which are made available on our webpages including:

- Annual Governance Statement
- Statement of accounts and Budget books
- Quarterly Financial monitoring report
- Medium term financial monitoring report
- Housing current delivery reports
- Planning updates and many more

Recovery Plan, Annual Report 2021-2022

Key	
	Alert
	Warning
	OK

Economic Recovery

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status									
Page 27 RPKPI30 Parking usage	Parking usage	73,602			187,472			251,662			250,281			250,895		
	Ashford and Tenterden Car Parks													Total Parking usage 21-22: 940,310 20-21: 428,069 19-20: 1,164,161		
Latest Note:																

March 2022 result

 91,983

Last 12 months



Overview of Car Park and on Street Sales March 2022 Update

Parking Business in March 2022 increased moving towards pre-Covid figures. ABC income figures are taken from Flow bird, RingGo, and ANPR systems.

Other relevant information of note is:-

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												

- Civic Centre provides ABC staff with free parking.
- Victoria Road Car Park is to be assessed as Test and Trace give the notice to quit the site in April and we hope to have the car park back in operation by July 2022.
- RingGo will be providing further marketing signs to drive and assist with our cashless agenda. These will cover some of the tired and discoloured signs around our car parks in Ashford and Tenterden.
- Card and Cashless make up 69% of payments with coin 31%.

Top Performing Car Parks

1. Vicarage Lane – the average per month – is **£38,087.49** 2. Recreation Ground –ave. **£36,395.87** 3. Elwick Place – ave. **£35,275.00**

Figures

Income increased in March 2022 to **£223,158.30**, stats in March 2020 = **£88,590.96**

Our total sales income is **£2,203,917.55**. **15% less than** 2019, pre Covid, 2019 Income **£2,591,786**.

Our projected annual forecast income is £2,125,210

Our projected monthly target was set at beginning of the financial year as £177k per month and figures show a £183K average at this time.

Expectations

- Henwood and Flour Mills Car Park to be redeveloped, however, there will be little impact on income
- New Country Car Park at Conningbrook. This will be wholly cashless, with EV chargers, with perhaps just 2 parking charges for up to 4 hours and then all day charge
- Victoria Park Car Park. Once back in Parking, the site will provide long-stay parking, with overflow parking for the new Hilton Hotel and season tickets for residents who do not meet on-street criteria.
- Park Mall car park is currently closed and will be having extensive works and cautiously we do see this opening until a new financial year.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22			
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
RPKPI51	Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	15.4%			11.3%			4.3% *Please note Square ft figures have been reviewed this quarter so figures are not directly comparable				10.1%			8%		

Latest Note

Percentage Occupancy Rate

Site	Square foot let	Lettable square foot	Percentage let
Ellingham	64,397 sf	64,397 sf	100.0%
Carlton Road	33,732 sf	44,496 sf	75.8%
Elwick Place	92,026 sf	94,351 sf	97.5%
International House	72,800 sf	82,462 sf	88.3%
Total	262,955 sf	285,706 sf	92.0%

Major sites that we acquired for commercial/investment purposes included. Please note Park Mall and the Commercial Quarter are not included as these were purchased for development and regeneration purposes.

Corporate Property Performance Annual Report 2020/21 reports on the revenue performance of the Council's corporate property portfolio during the financial year 2020-2021. It also advises of the work undertaken to increase and maintain the profitability of the portfolio. [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 28th October, 2021, 7.00 pm - Modern Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

RPKPI80	Business survival, measure based upon our business rates records	8.4%	8.2%	8.46%	8.2%	8.4%
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Latest Note

Business survival, measure based upon our business rates records comparing the total number of rated premises against those which have an empty property exemption or relief applied to their accounts.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22																																
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status																														
RPKPI81 Business support during the pandemic	Description of the Covid related business support provided.	<p>The Chancellor announced on 21 December 2021 that new Covid grant funding would be made available to help businesses in the leisure and hospitality sectors.</p> <p>This was made up of: The Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant 2021/22 - Businesses with a business rates account in the Hospitality, Leisure or Accommodation sectors & The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) – December 2021 - Businesses impacted by the Omicron variant but not eligible for the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant (OHLG).</p> <p>During the Q4 reporting period the Economic Development and Revs and Bens Teams working at pace to deliver this funding delivering:</p> <p>Omicron Hospitality & Leisure Grant (OHLG) - 396 businesses paid – total £1,336,750</p> <p>Omicron Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) – 114 businesses paid – total £241,019</p> <p>Town Centre Support Grant (TCSG) – 24 businesses paid – total £77,819</p> <p>Summary of support provided to businesses March 2020 – September 2020:</p> <table> <tr> <td>Small Business Grants</td> <td>1,757 grants paid</td> <td>£17,570,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Retail Hospitality (RHL) Grants</td> <td>560 grants paid</td> <td>£10,205,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Discretionary Grants</td> <td>175 grants paid</td> <td>£1,351,000</td> </tr> </table> <p>Schemes from November 2020 onwards:</p> <p>Local Restrictions Support Grants</p> <table> <tr> <td>November</td> <td>1,043 grants paid</td> <td>£1,767,458</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tier 3</td> <td>430 grants paid</td> <td>£466,618.47</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tier 4</td> <td>1,053 grants paid</td> <td>£1,015,866.47</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wet-led pub</td> <td>46 grants paid</td> <td>£46,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>January</td> <td>1,066 grants paid</td> <td>£2,715,696</td> </tr> <tr> <td>One-off</td> <td>1,066 grants paid</td> <td>£5,430,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>February</td> <td>1,068 grants paid</td> <td>£2,837,996</td> </tr> </table>															Small Business Grants	1,757 grants paid	£17,570,000	Retail Hospitality (RHL) Grants	560 grants paid	£10,205,000	Discretionary Grants	175 grants paid	£1,351,000	November	1,043 grants paid	£1,767,458	Tier 3	430 grants paid	£466,618.47	Tier 4	1,053 grants paid	£1,015,866.47	Wet-led pub	46 grants paid	£46,000	January	1,066 grants paid	£2,715,696	One-off	1,066 grants paid	£5,430,000	February	1,068 grants paid	£2,837,996
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status
		Restart														
		Restart (non-essential retail)			302 grants paid			£1,144,717								
		Restart (other)			731 grants paid			£6,898,000								
		Total LRSG/Restart			6,605 grants paid			£22,323,371.71								
		Additional Restrictions Grants			2,687 grants paid			£4,823,350.54								

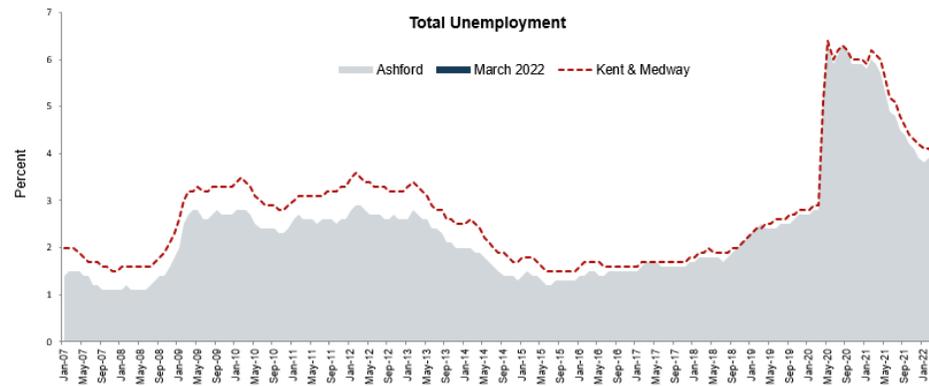
Latest Note

Information on the support provided is available on our [webpages](#).

More information on the prosperity of our local businesses is available within the Kent and Medway COVID-19 Economic Recovery Dashboard. [The Economic Recovery Dashboard](#) (XLSX, 1.3 MB). This dashboard has been developed to help support the economic recovery from COVID-19 in Kent and Medway. It draws from a range of economic indicators and uses modelled data to help identify the possible impact on local economies and those areas which may be more economically vulnerable.

Town Centre Support Grant recently launched - A grant scheme was available to support businesses to improve the visual appearance of Ashford Town Centre and to support businesses/landlords to improve their premises or attract investment into empty units. Made up of two grant streams - Shop Improvement Grant and an Empty Premises Grant. More information is available on the [business support webpages](#).

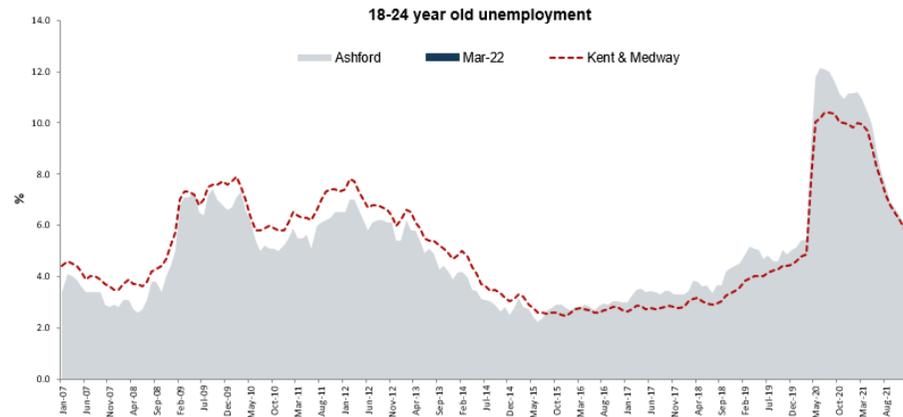
Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
RPKPI82 Unemployment	Unemployment figures taken monthly from Kent County Councils Economy and employment data.	5.9%			5%			4.4%			3.9%			3.8%		
Latest Note																



Source: ONS Claimant Count
Presented by: Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

March 2022	Number	% rate	Number change since February 2022	% change since February 2022	Number change since March 2021	% change since March 2021
Ashford	2,950	3.8%	-75	-2.5%	-1,660	-36.0%
Kent & Medway	44,790	4.0%	-1,085	-2.4%	-24,830	-35.7%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
RPKPI83 Unemployment 18-24yr olds Latest Note	Unemployment 18-24yr olds taken monthly from the Kent County Council economy and employment data	10.9%			9%			6.9%			5.8%			6%		



Source: ONS Claimant Count
Presented by: Kent Analytics, Kent County Council

18-24 Unemployment

March 2022	Number	% rate	Number change since February 2022	% change since February 2022	Number change since March 2021	% change since March 2021
Ashford	525	6.0%	+5	+1.0%	-430	-45.0%
Kent & Medway	7,805	5.5%	-80	-1.0%	-6,310	-44.7%

More information available within [Kent County Councils Economy and Employment data](#)
Latest available data on Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is available from [here](#).

Presentation on youth unemployment recently given to the Overview and Scrutiny committee, presentation is available to view at: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 8th June, 2021, 7.00 pm - Modern Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Community Recovery

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status									
RPKPI01 Rent arrears/loss	The arrears figure for general needs housing, garages and Chilmington.	312,078.81			376,024.12			542,151.59			430,313.92			£343,420.14		

Latest Note

£343,420.14 - This was our total figure for the end of the financial year.

We have seen a small increase from the 20/21 figure for arrears however we have seen a significant jump in rent roll debit with that increasing to £25,013,279.56 compared to £24,214,580.15 in 20/21 some increase of nearly £800,000.00 so a small increase in debt would be expected.

Our collection rate for the year finished at 99.24%

RPKPI04 Homelessness Presentations	No. of homelessness presentations	365			323			403			323			404		
RPKPI05 Homelessness Preventions (still in accomodation)	No. of households where homelessness was prevented	29			29			26			28			28		

Latest Note

With the cost of living soaring and the effects of the pandemic ongoing, [Ashford Borough Council has received £175,000 to help prevent homelessness](#). The government grant will help tackle rent arrears that have built up as a direct result of Covid-19.

The latest data tables on local government housing including Ashford Borough Council, covering social housing sales, homelessness, and affordable housing supply are available at the

following links: [Social housing sales](#) [Homelessness](#) [Affordable housing supply](#)

Report on the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme, presented on the November Cabinet agenda [Rough Sleeper Accommodation Project Move On - Update Report.pdf](#) ([modern.gov.co.uk](#)) along with [First Homes.pdf](#) ([modern.gov.co.uk](#))

RPKPI06	No. of complaints regarding poor conditions and/or ASB in the private rented sector resolved with formal action	1	6	14	6	7
Number of new complaints cases opened						

Latest note

Electrical safety standards in the private rented sector implemented during the Q2 period with notices issued on properties found to be in breach of this regulation, explaining the increase in the Q2 period.

RPKPI07	% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	99.93%	100%		99.98%	100%		99.84%	100%		99.48%	100%		99.54%	100%	
		Gas Safety Certificates														

Latest Note

As of end of March there were 11 properties overdue. One of which a court injunction was attempted, the others remain hard to access and all three parties, ABC, Swale and PCM continue to work together on a weekly, if not on a daily basis to gain access.

RPKPI08	No. of disabled facilities grants administered by the council	20	17	21	18	13
Disabled Facilities Grants Completed						

Latest Note

Low figure towards the end of the year due to contractor availability, Covid catch up and cost increases.

RPKPI31	% of businesses in the borough with a food hygiene rating above 3*	99.1%	98.5%		98.6%	98.5%		98.5%	98.5%		99%	98.5%		99.1%	98.5%	
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Latest Note

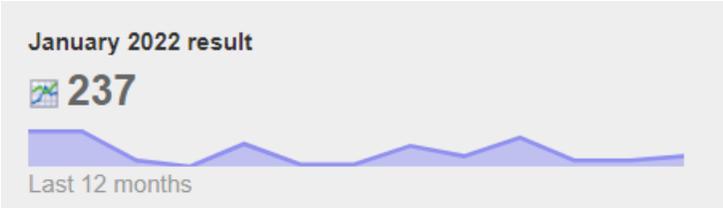
With additional inspection capacity being made available by Ashford Port Health, the Food and Health & Safety team were able to complete the Food Inspection programme for 2021/22 and meet the commitments made to the Food Standards Agency in the recovery programme.

RPKPI62	Average time taken to process a benefit change of circumstance in no. days	1.94	10		1.75	10		1.94	10		2.02	10		1.84	10	
RPKPI63	Average time taken to process a new benefit payment claim in no. days	26.33	28		26.35	28		24.27	28		25.2	28		25.96	28	

Latest Note

Benefit change of circumstance and new claims processing time continues to remain on target.

RPKPI64	Universal credit Monthly new starts	973	688	735	779	237* January figure only
Universal credit new claims						
Latest Note						



This looks at the number of starts to Universal Credit. The starts figures show the number of claims which have gone through the application process and been awarded Universal Credit. This data is available to Jobcentre Plus areas. The Jobcentre Plus office at which a claimant is recorded at is based upon the postcode of where the claimant lives. There are thirteen Jobcentre Plus areas in Kent and Medway and this figure is associated to the Ashford office.

RPKPI67	Welfare intervention new cases	435	329	279	243	362
Welfare intervention new cases						
Latest Note						

The number of welfare referrals overall, decreased during the pandemic, due to lockdown, various other support streams that had been available such as, the furlough scheme or the restriction on evictions. We are seeing the numbers asking for help and support rise again now that all restrictions have been lifted and we now find ourselves in an energy crisis.

Not captured within the stats, is all the work that the Welfare Officers did processing Test and Trace applications. From October 2020 to March 2022 (the length of the Test & Trace Support Scheme) the two Welfare Intervention Officers processed around 3000 Test & Trace Support Payment applications, offering additional support and advice to anyone who didn't qualify for the £500 payment.

RPKPI84	Number of positive covid 19 cases.	3,173	352	4,110	11,216	15,113
Number of positive covid 19 cases						

Latest Note



More information can be found at: [UK Summary | Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/collections/uk-summary-coronavirus-covid-19-in-the-uk)

Number of people with at least one positive COVID-19 test result, either lab-reported or rapid lateral flow test (England only), by specimen date. Cumulative cases as 31 March – 40525

RPKPI85	Website visits to covid 19 pages	44,890	14,526	13,167	15,085	18,636
Website visits to covid 19 pages						

Latest Note

Unique page views in March: 2,353 (48.74% decrease on February)

Top 5 pages: [Covid Homepage](#) (348), [Coronavirus Posters](#) (343), [Testing site article](#) (247), [Food Banks](#) (246), [Test and Trace Support Payment](#) (211).

Place Making, Regeneration and Infrastructure

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
RPKPI02 Council Affordable Housing - New Build	No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	0			65			29			0			31		
Latest note	<p>Q1 - 65 homes were acquired through the off-plan purchase of the East block of the New Quarter, to be known as Stour Heights. These were 27 x 1-beds and 38 x 2-beds. Q2 - East Stour Court, where 29 homes delivered - 24 x 1-bed and 5 x 2-bed flats for older people in which they can live independently. Q3 - Berry Place Independent Living scheme completed – 16 x 2-bed flats; 15 x 1-bed flats. During the period a consultation was launched on plans for temporary accommodation for homeless people at Henwood Car Park, The council has appointed ZedPods, who build high-quality factory-produced modular units, to supply 23 homes for the site. They are highly-insulated, triple-glazed homes with heat recovery ventilation and featuring 175 solar panels integrated into the roof. The fabric of the building is designed to create net-zero carbon homes with very low running costs.</p>															
RPKPI03 Council Affordable Housing - On-Street Purchases	No. of additional on-street purchase affordable homes delivered by council housing	6			10			4			5			3		
Latest note	<p>22 Properties completed in the year with further progressing through the conveyancing process.</p>															

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
RPKPI10	% of planning applications approved	83%	90%		84%	90%		86%	90%		88%	90%		85%	90%	

Latest note

The Council's ability to determine applications in the Stour catchment part of the Borough continues to be constrained at present by the potential impact of new residential accommodation on the Stodmarsh Lakes European Designated Sites, which lie east of Canterbury. Without necessary mitigation of additional nitrates caused by new residential development, the granting of planning permission may be regarded as unlawful. A strategic mitigation plan may enable permissions to be granted to the Stour catchment area when secured. In the meantime, this is likely to have a negative impact on the ability of the Council to approve applications. Advice has been given by Natural England on Nutrient Neutrality for new developments in the Stour catchment and more information is available on the planning pages of our [website](#).

A Nutrient Mitigation Strategy for the Stour Catchment in Ashford Borough, the first steps to mitigating the issue of water quality degradation at Stodmarsh Lakes, which has impacted new housing development in the Ashford borough, is set to start with Ashford Borough Council's Cabinet agreeing that land acquisition options for new wetland areas should now be explored and pursued as a matter of urgency. [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 29th July, 2021, 7.00 pm - Modern Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#).

RPKPI11	Speed of Major Planning Application Decisions % of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks (or within such extended period as agreed in writing between the applicant and the local authority)	91%	65%		94%	65%		45.45%	65%		91%	65%		85%	65%	
RPKPI11A	% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	72%	75%		78%	75%		85%	75%		87%	75%		85%	75%	

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
amended to reflect 24 rolling month																

Latest note

The latest data tables on local government Planning including Ashford Borough Council, covering the speed and quality of planning decisions are available at the following link: [Live tables on planning application statistics](#)

Performance has significantly improved across the year and remains good in respect of major application determinations, although it is recognised that the impact of the Stodmarsh Lakes habitats issue on the ability to determine applications is starting to result in a delay to determination timescales in the short term for residential proposals in the Stour catchment area. Officers will continue to work closely with applicants to ensure that potential solutions can be identified and revised timescales for determination agreed where possible.

Given the below target Q2 measure which is acknowledged this measure is being closely monitored by the planning team. Given the relatively small number of major applications, a small number of applications delayed beyond the 13 week window can have a significant impact on the reported figure.

Page 11 RPKPI12 Speed of Non-Major Planning Application Decisions	% of minor and other planning applications determined within 8 weeks (or within such extended period as has been agreed in writing between the applicant and the council).	88%	75%		96%	75%		90%	75%		90%	75%		79%	75%	
	RPKPI12A % of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	86%	80%		88%	80%		89%	80%		91%	80%		90%	80%	

Latest note

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												

The latest data tables on local government Planning including Ashford Borough Council, covering the speed and quality of planning decisions are available at the following link: [Live tables on planning application statistics](#)

Performance in non-major schemes remains strong and above target. Enhanced use of officer delegations is helping to maintain performance levels.

RPKPI14	Number includes all conditions applications, pre-app cases, as well as applications for outline, full or reserved matters consent. Reducing backlog with a capacity set at 550 open cases	681	550		797	550		759	550		846	550		839	550	
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Test note

Application numbers have continued to increase across 2021/22 and a combination of Stodmarsh plus a high number of vacant posts in the team from Spring 21 onwards has contributed. Consultant support has partially filled the gap but not wholly.

In order to ensure cases may be determined as swiftly as possible once a strategic mitigation solution for Stodmarsh is brought forward and consented, officers are taking cases to the point where proposals can be agreed in all other aspects pending the nutrient mitigation solution. This includes any applications where a Committee resolution may be required and/or a Section 106 Agreement to deal with other matters.

The service has plans for an applications clearance week designed to shift a lot of our older applications that have built up over the last 12 months. The proposal is to free planning officers for one week to focus purely on making planning decisions. This means that access to those staff will be restricted for a week in terms of phone calls, e-mails, meetings and other day-to-day activities. Our target is to clear between 150 - 200 old cases in that week.

RPKPI21	% of working population cycling to work based on the national walking and cycling data statistics (data is from the National Travel Survey and Active Lives Survey)	<p>Cycling for travel - (the data set we're using for cycling to work as our closest cross reference stat) – the overall percentage of people surveyed that said they cycled for travel has increased from 9.1% in 2019 to 12.4% in 2020. However the relative number of journeys across the sample has reduced by 31%.</p> <p>We believe this reduction in number of journeys is due to the impact of Covid and the numbers of people staying home to work from March 2020 to December 2020. An increase in the number of people using a bike to travel in the Borough during the pandemic is encouraging and, with further engagement and promotion of walking and cycling, we expect the number of journeys to improve over 2021 as society opens back up.</p> <p>Cycling for leisure – the overall percentage of people surveyed that said they cycled for leisure has increased from 26% in 2019 to 35.4% in 2020. The relative number of journeys increased by 95%.</p>														
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status
		Any cycling for any reason - the overall percentage of people surveyed that said they cycled has increased from 33.5% in 2019 to 43.8% in 2020. Therelative number of journeys increased by 50%.														
RPKPI22 Number of organisations committed to active travel plans cycling/ walking	Number of organisations committed to travel plans cycling/walking	The specification for the active travel commissioning is being finalised with a contractor lined up to deliver the first phase of the pilot scheme. It is intended that a large local employer and Ashford Borough Council will be the first organisation to benefit from the formalising of Active Travel Plans to support the move to other ways of traveling around the town and borough. Officers are in further positive talks with both Givaudan and Premier Foods to commission projects to develop new Active Travel Plans for this Autumn (2022).														
RPKPI40 Recycling Rate	% of borough waste recycled or composted	48%	50%		51.67%	50%		55.33%	50%		48.67%	50%		49%	50%	
Latest note	Unconfirmed year total at 51.25% of recyclate for the 21/22 financial year. Ashford's recycling rate remains comfortably above the national target of 50%, and the overall figure for Ashford (54.2% for the previous year) places us 48th in the country, 16 th in the South East and top in Kent. These statistics form part of DEFRA's nationwide recycling league tables . Waste data from UK local authorities is reported to WasteDataFlow with statistics available at the following links. WasteDataFlow Waste and recycling statistics															
RPKPI41 Refuse Collection Success Rate	% of successful refuse collections per 100,000 refuse collections made.	99.97%	99.97%		99.96%	99.97%		99.93%	99.96%		99.97%	99.96%		99.97%	99.96%	
Latest note	Waste data from UK local authorities is reported to WasteDataFlow with statistics available at the following links. WasteDataFlow Waste and recycling statistics															

Organisational Change and Workforce Development

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
RPKPI50	Contribution to budget from commercial investments utilising the budgeted figures provided as part of the councils budget books. Measure to start from Sept 20	82%			70%			65%			85%			85%		
Contribution to budget from commercial investments																

Latest note

Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.

Corporate Property Performance Annual Report 2020/21 this reports on the revenue performance of the Council's corporate property portfolio during the financial year 2020-2021. It also advises of the work undertaken to increase and maintain the profitability of the portfolio. [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 28th October, 2021, 7.00 pm - Modern Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

We have seen a decrease in vacancies due to a number of new leases being signed. However, we have seen a percentage decrease in expected income due to the continued impact from the coronavirus pandemic.

RPKPI60	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month.	94.25%	99%		23.46%	24.75%		51.52%	49.5%		79.36%	74.24%		97.6%	99%	
Business Rates Collection																
RPKPI61	Council Tax Collection Rate	96.7%	98.25%		29.72%	24.57%		57.48%	49.14%		85.37%	73.71%		97.4%	98.25%	
Council Tax Collection Rate																

Latest note

Government finance including Ashford Borough Council, covering borrowing and investment, capital payments and receipts, local Council Tax support, quarterly revenue outturn and receipts of

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												

Council Taxes and national non-domestic rates are available [here](#)

RPKPI70	Number of days sickness per full time equivalent	6.98			6.45			6.45			9.96			9.96		
Number of days sickness per full time equivalent																

Latest note

Period 1st Oct 2021 to 30th March 2022

Based on the total FTE as at 31st March 2022 **average absence due to sickness and coronavirus is 9.96 days** (annualised), up from 6.45 days (annualised) in the previous period.

A total of **515 days** were lost due to Coronavirus, more than the 137 days in the previous period but reflecting the larger number of employees who were unwell as a result of the virus around December to March. This category has now been merged back into sickness so future reports will not show this as a separate absence type (although it will still show as an individual absence reason).

Average absence per FTE due to coronavirus only in this period was **2.02 per FTE** (annualised).

A total of **2,021.73 days** were lost due to 'normal' sickness.

Average absence due to sickness only in this period was **7.93 per FTE** (annualised) up from **5.89 days per FTE** (annualised) reported in the last six month period

RPKPI90	number of ongoing litigation/court proceedings (volume measure)	79			89			100			114			140		
Number of ongoing litigation/ court proceedings (volume measure)																

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status												
RPKPI90A	number of cases in which costs have been awarded against ABC (effectiveness measure)	0			0			0			0			0		
Litigation number of cases in which costs have been awarded against ABC (effectiveness measure)																

Latest note

With the addition of another member of the litigation team in the final quarter, capacity for litigation has increased and good use of this is being spent on ASB matters, Fly-tipping and injunction/warrant matters.

Measure covers those litigation/court proceedings being furthered by legal services.

RPKPI91	number of new 106 files opened	5			4			3			2			2		
number of new 106 files opened																
RPKPI91A	number of draft 106 agreements sent out	0			4			2			3			0		
number of draft 106 agreements sent out																
RPKPI91B	number of 106 cases completed	4			0			1			3			2		
number of 106 cases completed																

Latest note

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review the council's Section 106 process, recommendations available within the final report. [S106 Task Group - Final Report.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) with a [S106 Scrutiny Review](#) – Update provides to the committee in May 22

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2020/21			Q1 2021/22			Q2 2021/22			Q3 2021/22			Q4 2021/22		
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status
RPKPICOM1 Income Generation and Savings		<p>We are in the process of resetting the program, setting new milestones and fresh KPIs; working with MT on benefits of a cultural shift In line with the formation of the Corporate Plan 2022-24.</p> <p>In the meantime, however, one of our projects Garden Waste, is nearing completion and we have just heard that the project, as part of our wider commercialisation strategy has been shortlisted as a finalist in the national APSE Awards, in the Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship Initiative Category. Winners to be announced in September, although a great achievement in itself and indication of a very positive direction of travel to date.</p> <p>Garden Waste Development project, aims to increase customer base through new online payment systems and ability to sign up for annual contract at anytime of year are proving successful. Further marketing and route analysis is planned.</p> <p>Other projects that will contribute to overall target require a longer lead in time before financial returns found, e.g. efficiency savings anticipated through theCategory Management project which aims to streamline council contracts.</p> <p>Much of the work undertaken this past year will realise revenue and efficiencies in the coming years and is not reflected in the quarterly return. Commercial Services Strategy taken to July's Cabinet.</p>														
RPKPICOM2 Project Completion																
RPKPICOM3 Improved Commercial Acumen																

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ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY



CHAIRMAN

CLLR. NOEL OVENDEN

REPORT AUTHOR

ABI MOFFATT

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I am pleased to present the annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2021/22 year. The report details work carried out by the Committee over the year in line with the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

The Committee carried out a major scrutiny review of the Section 106 Process and this was conducted by a Task and Finish Group which resulted in 8 recommendations. I am pleased to note that all recommendations were endorsed by the Cabinet in November 2021. The Committee will be looking to receive an update on these recommendations later in the year.

More recently, the Budget Scrutiny Task Group also carried out another successful review of the draft budget for the 2022/23 year and all recommendations were approved by the Cabinet.

I would like to extend my thanks to all Members in and out of the Committee who have attended meetings and contributed to discussion. I would like to also thank Officers who have taken the time to present information to the Committee and Task Group, and participate in a number of question and answer sessions.

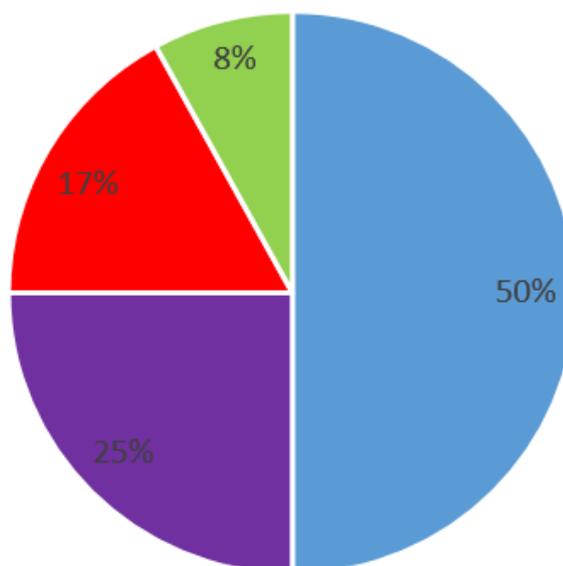
**16****SCRUTINY REPORTS
& PRESENTATIONS****7****COMMITTEE MEETINGS****2****TASK AND FINISH GROUPS**

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Cllr Noel Ovenden (Ch)
 Cllr Brendan Chilton (VCh)
 Cllr. Michael Burgess
 Cllr. Heather Hayward
 Cllr. Kalysha Howard-Smith
 Cllr. Jessamy Blanford
 Cllr. Dara Farrell
 Cllr. David Ledger
 Cllr. Geoff Meaden
 Cllr. Ken Mulholland
 Cllr. Larry Krause
 Cllr. Trevor Brooks

POLITICAL BALANCE

The chart shows the political balance of the 12 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



■ Conservative
 ■ Ashford Independent
 ■ Labour
 ■ Green

INTRODUCTION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Local Government Act 2000 (the Act) introduced a requirement that councils with a 'Leader and Executive' arrangement must include the provision of one or more Overview and Scrutiny Committees within their council structure. Under section 21 of the Act, the council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has power to submit reports and make recommendations to the Cabinet or full Council on any aspect of council business or any matter affecting the Borough or its residents.

The constitution of Ashford Borough Council contains provisions for a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out the functions detailed in the Act, although the Committee may assemble task groups from its membership for specific reviews.

In the 2019/20 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had 12 members, appointed in line with the broad political balance of the council. The roles of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee were appointed to opposition members, although the Committee operates apolitically in its discussions, with all members of the Committee working together to ensure that the council and its services are acting effectively and efficiently.



SCRUTINY AT ASHFORD BC

Methods of Scrutiny

Issues can be scrutinised by the Committee in the following ways:

By considering reports produced by Officers and having the opportunity to ask questions about the different aspects of the council's business.

Inviting representatives from outside bodies or Parish and Community Councils to talk about topics of interest to residents.

Using the 'call in' method to bring forward matters of urgency for considerations by the Committee, and which are of interest to the public.

The Committee welcomes and encourages Cabinet Members and other non-Committee Members to attend and take part in meetings when appropriate.

Call-In

The call-in process allows the Chair of the Committee, or five members of the Council, to call in a decision which is the responsibility of the Cabinet, which has been made but not implemented. The Committee can ask the Cabinet to reconsider the decision or can refer it to Council.

There have been no called in items this year.

Public Participation

Overview and Scrutiny is open to participation from the public and involvement in the process is actively encouraged. Throughout the year, scrutiny has been committed to being open and accessible by the public and therefore has been kept as a hybrid meeting. This has meant that residents have been able to access the meeting either in person or watch live online. As of the most recent meeting in May 2022, 10 public attendees joined the live meeting held in the council's Committee Rooms and online via Microsoft Teams.

Although attendance at the actual meetings was fairly low, recordings of the meetings on YouTube received up to 45 views per video from meetings in 2022.

Some of the ways for the public to get involved include suggesting a topic for investigation as a task and finish group; providing evidence to or at a meeting; and being co-opted on to a topic group. The Committee is keen to see more public participation both in its task and finish groups and in its committee meetings.

YEAR OVERVIEW

	June 2021	- Youth Unemployment in Ashford Borough
	July 2021	- Support Given to the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector - O&S Annual Report
	September 2021	- Support Given to the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector - O&S Annual Report - Young People's Mental Health
	October 2021	- Carbon Neutral Action Plan - Digital Transformation Update - Budget Scrutiny Review - ABC Annual Report
	November 2021	- Section 106 Final Findings Report
	February 2022	- Annual Safeguarding Report - Annual CSP REport - Corporate Performance Report - Budget Scrutiny Final Report
	March 2022	- Overview and Scrutiny Work

SECTION 106 TASK GROUP

During April 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review the Section 106 process. Members raised particular concern over not being involved or consulted on proposed Section 106 contributions, prior to a report being submitted to the Planning Committee. The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group conducted an in depth review to ascertain the various stages of the process and understand where Members and Parish Councils could have greater input.

The Task Group assembled of 7 Members; Cllr Ovenden (Chair), Cllr. Chilton, Cllr. Ledger, Cllr. Blanford, Cllr. Mulholland, Cllr. Campkin and Cllr. Farrell, to examine the Section 106 Process and make some recommendations to the full Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group recommendations reflected discussions had during the series of Witness Sessions. Both oral and written evidence was provided by Officers and Parish Councils to help the Task Group understand the Section 106 process. The committee are looking forward to hearing regular updates on how the review recommendations are being progressed.

Members insisted that a process mapping exercise of the Section 106 process was undertaken prior to progression of the later recommendations. It was agreed that once all the stages of the Section 106 process had been mapped out, this information would inform the details necessary to implement recommendations II to VIII.

Recommendations

I. A process mapping exercise is undertaken to provide clarity and guidance to Officers and Members involved in the Section 106 process. Once completed, the process map will inform recommendations II to VIII.

II. Guidance and training is provided for Officers involved in the Section 106 process to clarify roles and responsibilities of all Officers. Additionally, a 'handbook' is created for both Members and Parish Councillors, to explain the basic concepts of Section 106.

III. Communication over Section 106 is improved between the Planning Service and Parish Councils including key contact(s) for accessing advice.

IV. Training on Section 106 should be provided to Members and Parish Councils on an annual basis. The initial programme for the training should be reviewed by the Member Training Panel in consultation with the Chair of the Section 106 Task Group.

V. The new Planning IT software is expected to provide information on the council's website about what Section 106 monies are available to individual parishes.

VI. Delivery of the Infrastructure Contributions SPD should be prioritised. The SPD should provide an up to date list of what is expected of developers within a single document. This will provide clarity for all parties involved in the Section 106 process.

VII. There is a standardising of Section 106 Agreements and use of templates where appropriate.

VIII. Legal Services are trained to use the new IT system adopted by the Planning Department, to enable them access to relevant Planning documentation and therefore streamline the process.

BUDGET SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

In accordance with the council's Constitution, the council has a duty to scrutinise its draft Capital and Revenue Budgets. The Committee constituted a Task Group made up of three Committee Members and one co-opted Member to undertake this work, and present its findings of the draft Budget for 2022/23 within a final budget scrutiny report.

The draft budget for 2022/23 was presented to the Task Group at its first meeting; this included all service budgets and financial risks. Over a series of meetings, Members decided to dedicate additional scrutiny time to the following topics:

- The Port Health Service
- The council's reserves positions and forecast
- Savings and recharges
- Planning and Development Service and the achievability of their savings target.
- Details on expected borrowing interest rate increases.
- Housing Service and delivery of savings target.
- The risks around the maintenance of assets.
- Risks linked to the commercial property portfolio.

Recommendations

The Task Group concluded budget scrutiny at a wrap up meeting and approved the following recommendations to Cabinet:

I. The council's draft budget for 2022/23 is sound and that mitigation plans are in place for any increases to borrowing interest rates during 2022/23.

II. The council's reserves position is sufficient to manage the economic risks to the 2022/23 budget.

III. The Task Group support Cabinet's recent decision to have regular monitoring of delivery against Service savings targets, through the quarterly budget monitoring reports in 2022/23.

IV. It be noted that the Task Group have concerns over the ability to deliver the savings target in the Planning and Development Service for the next budget year.

V. It be noted that delivery of the Henwood project needs to be timely in order to meet the savings targets in the next financial year.

VI. It be noted that the Task Group supports the invest-to-save approach regarding homelessness prevention proposals following the service review in 2021/22.

PRIORITY TOPICS

Youth Unemployment

Further to Member concerns around low levels of employment in young people, the Committee requested information around youth unemployment in the Borough.

External representatives included the Skills and Employability Manager at KCC who gave a presentation regarding youth unemployment in Ashford and the South East, as well as the information around the varying levels of unemployment in different areas of Ashford. Additionally, the Principal Lead for Post 16 Education at KCC also attended to provide the Committee with information around young adults who were not in education or training, and explained what was being done to help these younger people. A final presentation was given by the Partnership Manager for Ashford at the Department for Work and Pensions, who was able to advise the Committee how their team helped young people get in to employment and the work currently being done with local businesses to encourage this.

-A question and answer style session was opened up to Members who wanted to gain a better understanding of the barriers preventing young people from taking up jobs. Other lines of inquiry included the impact of the pandemic for 16 to 18 year olds and how different sectors were hit worse than others.

The Committee endorsed the work done internally towards improving youth unemployment in Ashford and supported the programme of work at KCC and the DWP.

Young People's Mental Health

The Committee requested information around young people's mental health and the provision that was available for young people with mental health issues. Members welcomed the Associate Director of Children and Maternity at the NHS Kent and Medway CCG to a Committee meeting, who gave a detailed presentation which covered the following themes:

- Spotlight: Impact of Covid
- System Response
- Continuing Challenges
- Services in Ashford
- Ashford children and young people's mental health and neurodevelopment services
- KOOTH online counselling
- Mind and Body early-intervention self-harm support
- NELFT locality (MH) waiting times
- NELFT ND assessment waiting
- Local Transformation Plan

Members had the opportunity to ask questions in addition to the presentation. In particular, Members asked about the relationship between the NHS CCG and the council. Further discussion was also had around the waiting times for mental health services for young people and the resources available to assist child refugees.

PRIORITY TOPICS

Carbon Neutral Action Plan

The Carbon Neutral Action Plan was received by the Committee as Members felt it would be beneficial to scrutinise this prior to its adoption at Cabinet. The Strategy and Policy Development Manager gave a presentation to the Committee, which provided a recap of the Plan and an overview of the consultation outcomes. It included details around the overall aim of the plan, the eight priorities and the recently conducted public consultation.

Members were invited to asked questions regarding the Action Plan. Members suggested that targets should be included in the Plan going forward. Members also raised questions around how the council was going to help improve air quality and carbon offsetting. The Committee noted and supported the Action Plan.

Digital Transformation Recommendations Update

In June 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group formed to conduct a review on the progress of digital transformation across council services. The review resulted in eight recommendations and these were approved by Cabinet in October 2020. In October 2021, the Committee wished to review the progress made for each of the actions since they were approved.

Members noted that since Cabinet approved the digital recommendations last year, good progress was made for some of the actions. Several actions had been completed so far and any outstanding were expected to be delivered by the end of 2021 or during 2022.

Although Members were pleased that progress had been made, some Members expressed some concern that the progress on some of the recommendations had been slow. However, Members were advised that the IT & Digital Transformation Advisory Committee would be happy to look in to some specific queries Members had.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Annual Sickness Report

This report provided annual information on sickness absenteeism for 2020/21 and wider data that provided a picture of the council's general corporate health.

Safeguarding Update

This update provided the Committee with the council's annual safeguarding update. The report focused on the council's obligation to work in partnership to protect children, young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development. It gave information on the safeguarding activity that had been undertaken and raised awareness of emerging issues. It also supported the delivery of the priorities set by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi-agency Partnership and the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board.

Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Update

This report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the community safety annual update. The report referred to the council's statutory obligation to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder, the work being progressed through the Ashford Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The report detailed crime statistics for the borough and positioning against other districts within the county. Ashford was shown as being a safe borough as the level of recorded crime remained low and there was a reduction in many crime types including serious violence offences.

The report highlighted an overall reduction in reports of anti-social behaviour with the exception of the town centre ward. It gave information on current community safety priorities, actions that had been taken to meet the priorities and raised awareness of emerging issues. It also supported the delivery of the priorities set by the Police and Crime Commissioner through his Safer in Kent plan 2021/2022. Two major CSP projects were spotlighted. The Safer Streets Project that aims to make our public spaces safer and help women and girls feel safe, and the Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT) which empowers communities and changes lives by improving health, education and employment and reducing crime.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Corporate Performance Reports

Quarterly reports were presented to the Committee to demonstrate the council's performance across all services and highlight any areas of concern.



WORK PROGRAMME

2022/23

Topic	Scope of what is to be scrutinised	Date
Consultation and Engagement	A Task and Finish group will be set up to examine how the council engages with residents and look at the consultation process for corporate issues.	Spring/Summer 2022
Hybrid Working	A report will be brought forward for Members to explore how well the hybrid arrangements have been working and in particular consider this in terms of performance, customer satisfaction, savings, human resources and recruitment.	July 2022
Annual Sickness Report	The Committee expect to receive a report providing the Committee with annual sickness information for the recent year.	July 2022
Freedom Leisure	Members have requested to review the council's new leisure operator. Scrutiny of this topic will look to examine how the service has been running, the savings made to the council and the levels of customer satisfaction with the service.	September 2022
Planning Service Progress Update	During scrutiny of the draft budget for 2022/23, Members agreed that it was important to closely monitor the progress of the Service and an update report on this in later 2022 has been requested by the Committee.	November 2022
Budget Scrutiny Meetings	Scrutiny of the draft budget 2022/23 will take place over three or four Task Group meetings during December and a final report is expected to the Committee to summarise the findings.	December to January 2022/23

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