



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL on **Tuesday, 14th February, 2023 at 7.00 pm.**

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

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

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

Agenda

Page Nos.

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 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 | |
| See Agenda Item 2 for further details | |
| 3. Minutes of the last Meeting | 3 - 6 |
| To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 8 th November 2022. | |
| 4. Final report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group | 7 - 30 |
| 5. Final report of the Planning IT System Delivery Task Group | 31 - 42 |
| 6. Corporate Performance Report - Quarter 3 2022/23 | 43 - 70 |
-

6 February 2023

Queries concerning this agenda? Please contact Member Services

Telephone: 01233 33034 Email: membersservices@ashford.gov.uk

Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: <https://www.ashford.moderngov.co.uk>

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.

This page is intentionally left blank

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 **8th November 2022**

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Barrett, Blanford, Ledger, Meaden

Apologies:

Cllrs. Burgess, Hayward, Mulholland

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllrs. Brooks, Feacey, Howard-Smith

Head of Policy & Performance, Policy & Scrutiny Officer

In attendance:

Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Member Services Officer

207 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 11th October 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

A Member asked about the process for making recommendations to Cabinet. The Chairman confirmed that the Committee can approach Cabinet or Council. Past agenda items would have to be put back on a future agenda for review and action.

208 Report of the Consultation and Engagement Task Group

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which outlined the key areas discussed by the Task Group during the review and detailed any findings and conclusions. The Task Group noted that the Council had consulted frequently with residents concerning policies, strategies, and developments. Overall, the Task Group supported this work and felt it would be useful to explore new ways of reaching residents in the Borough that may involve looking outside of traditional surveys and questionnaires. Public participation at public facing committees had improved due to the new hybrid working arrangements. However, it was suggested that more work could be done to engage residents with the work of the O&S Committee through social media and the Council's resident

magazine. There were eight recommendations within the report, of which Management Team supported all of them.

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

- A Member applauded the idea to create a Citizens Panel as a proactive way to increase regular face-to-face engagement with residents and the Committee discussed the pros and cons of such forums. One Member noted that it was important to be mindful about placing extra work on Officers. The Chairman advised that at this stage, the recommendations still needed to be approved, and suggested those Members with views on this specific idea attend the Cabinet meeting to voice their opinions. On a secondary note, Cllr Chilton recommended that his name be removed from the membership of the Task Group since he was unable to attend the meetings.
- A review on the recommendations was expected to be undertaken after six months from approval. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer would put this onto the Tracker for April 2023.

Recommended:

That

I. Corporate consultation guidance be produced to provide services with good practice for setting up future consultations. The guidance should include details on the different methods of consultation and set out some minimum standards that need to be complied with before and after a consultation has concluded.

II. Non-conventional methods of consultation should continue to be explored by the Council in order to increase levels of engagement from residents such as video and Hello Lamppost.

III. The use of easy-read versions of consultation papers should be considered for all public consultations.

IV. An internal advisory group should be formed for Officers to review consultations before they are published. The group would meet informally to test and feedback to services about proposed surveys.

V. A calendar of consultations is produced to ensure that the Council can oversee how many consultations are issued to residents during one period.

VI. Work to increase subscribers to ABC publications should continue to be developed by the Council.

VII. The Council explore options around creating a Citizens Panel to encourage local residents to give their views and opinions on services and issues that affect the Borough.

VIII. Residents should be engaged more with the annual scrutiny

work programme via the Council's communications channels.

209 Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 2 2022/23

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the Corporate Performance Report, which summarised performance against the Council's suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Some areas to note were that the Cost of Living increases were starting to impact business survival rates, homelessness presentations were also increasing, and unemployment figures that were previously decreasing were now starting to plateau. The report did not include Planning KPI figures, owing to the Planning Team having to complete the National Return due at the end of November. However, it was expected that performance would broadly be in line with the previous quarters.

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

- In response to a query asking how far back the figures went, (in order to see previous trends, prior to Covid and lockdowns), the Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer would speak to the Finance team to try to retrieve past data.
- A Member spoke about business vacancy rates, and voiced his concern for Carlton Road with a 12% vacancy rate. He expressed further concern regarding Council Affordable Housing On Street Purchases (KPI 18) and the increase in Homeless Presentations (KPI 19). The Chairman explained that the statistics did not necessarily present the full picture. Vacancy rates would be much lower if the Designer Outlet and other out of town retail units were included within the figures. KPI's were reviewed at the same time as the new Corporate Plan, at which point new ones could be set.
- It was highlighted that the Stodmarsh issue had influenced where developers were now looking to acquire land, often in areas outside of the Local Plan and this resulted in an increase to Officers time and workload, to deal with appeals. Planning and Housing were outlined as some of the customer facing roles with often challenging workloads, and the services were praised for their good work.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted

210 Reports Tracker and Scrutiny Matrix

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and highlighted that Budget Scrutiny was coming up in December and the Teams invitations had been sent out.

A Member asked about the Freedom Leisure Contract and whether the audit review would negate the Committee's evaluation. The Chairman explained that it would be

OSC
081122

beneficial to assess the item after the audit process was completed, and to decide then whether the O&S Committee would still wish to scrutinise.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: <https://ashford.moderngov.co.uk>

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14 February 2023

Report Title: Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

**Report Author &
Job Title:** Abi Sheppard
Policy and Scrutiny Officer

**Task Group
Chairman:** Cllr. N Ovenden



Summary:	The Overview and Scrutiny Budget Scrutiny Task Group has scrutinised the council's draft 2023/24 budget over four meetings during December and January. The Task Group have made six recommendations for Cabinet to consider when making their final budget proposals to recommend to Council.
-----------------	--

Key Decision: NO

**Significantly
Affected Wards:** None specifically

Recommendations: **The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Cabinet that:**

- I. The council's draft budget for 2023/24 is sound and deliverable (noting recommendation II).
- II. The Task Group supports the proposal to use reserves to fund the 2023/24 deficit.
- III. The Task Group notes that in order to mitigate against the challenges presented by the current economic climate, a savings strategy needs to be developed to bridge the budget gap.
- IV. The Task Group note that work should be undertaken regarding the estates portfolio and the council's financial liabilities.

- V. Resources should be allocated to ensure the council continues to deliver more than the minimum requirement of 10% for fire safety checks in homes.
- VI. A presentation is provided to the wider council regarding the Housing Revenue Account.

Policy Overview: Under the council's Constitution, the O&S Committee has a duty to scrutinise the council's draft Revenue and Capital Budgets.

Financial Implications: As noted in the report

Legal Implications As Policy Overview above

Equalities Impact Assessment Not required as appended to main budget report

Other Material Implications: As noted in the report

Exempt from Publication: NO

Background Papers: [Draft 2023/24 budget](#), report to Cabinet 24 November 2022
Minutes of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group meetings are included in the Appendix.

Contact:
Abi Sheppard Policy and Scrutiny Officer
abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330394

Report Title: Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Introduction and Background

1. In accordance with the council's Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the council's draft Capital and Revenue Budgets. The Committee constituted a Task Group made up of five Members to undertake this work, and presents its findings of the draft Budget for 2023/24 within this report.

Report of the Chairman of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

2. The draft budget documents were considered by the Task Group and detailed how the council intends to fund its services and initiatives for the next municipal year. Although there may be some financial uncertainties during the next year, sufficient reserves were identified to mitigate the potential risks.
3. Members noted that the budget relied on use of reserves to fund the 2023/24 deficit and reserve levels remained strong despite this. Also, action was required to deliver savings in future and the Task Group agreed that work was needed to develop a savings strategy to achieve them and bridge the budget gap.
4. In relation to the council's assets, there was a national decline in need for rented office space, however, there had been an upshift in light commercial units. The Council also had a diverse property portfolio to reduce concentration risk which is managed by specialist teams.
5. I would like to thank the Members of the Task Group and all of the Officers who were involved with scrutinising the proposed budget for 2023/24. The Group were grateful for the hard work and time that officers had taken to prepare various presentations and reports regarding their Service. I would also like to thank the Portfolio Holders and other Members who attended the meetings.

Summary

6. The budget scrutiny sessions yielded much information on the financial and resource challenges facing the authority and the Task Group focused on a number of key risks relating to the achievability of next year's budget.
7. The draft budget for 2023/24 was presented to the Task Group at its first meeting; this included all service budgets and financial risks. The purpose of this session was to assist Members in determining which areas to dedicate additional scrutiny time, these included the following:
 - a. The council's reserves positions and forecast.
 - b. Savings within the budget not yet identified

- c. Details on the borrowing portfolio and the expected borrowing interest rate increases.
- d. Housing Revenue Account Maintenance Programme
- e. Homelessness provision and housing options
- f. The risks around the maintenance of assets.
- g. Risks linked to the commercial property portfolio.

Consultation

8. The council's Management Team have since seen the recommendations made by the Task Group and a summary of their advice to the Cabinet has been tabled below:

No.	Recommendation	Summary	Management Team Advice
I	The council's draft budget for 2023/24 is sound and deliverable (noting recommendation II).	The Task Group agreed that at this current time the council's draft budget was sound. It was advised that increases to borrowing interest rates were expected next year and some increases were factored into the budget.	MT noted the recommendation.
II	The Task Group supports the proposal to use reserves to fund the 2023/24 deficit.	It was proposed to Members that reserves would need to be used in this the next financial year to fund the 2023/24 deficit, and Members supported this strategy to enable the budget to be deliverable.	MT noted the recommendation. MT accepts the use of reserves is for this year's budget only. The budget has been managed properly but a deficit has been created by uncontrollable external factors. Reserves have been set aside as a contingency for circumstances such as this.
III	The Task Group notes that in order to mitigate against the challenges presented by the current economic climate, a savings strategy needs to be developed to bridge the budget gap.	The need for savings was clearly apparent to maintain the financial strength of the Council. Proposals were currently being developed and have been discussed with Directors before presentation to Senior Management and the current administration. The savings proposals were not currently at the stage where they could be shared with the Task Group.	MT noted the recommendation. The savings strategy is already underway and approximately £200k has already been identified. Details of this would be reported to Members soon.
IV	The Task Group note that work should be undertaken to assess the council's estates portfolio to determine whether assets should be retained.	Overall, Members were confident that there was no risk at this stage in time for the upcoming budget. However, work was required to assess the condition of the Council's assets and	MT agreed the recommendation. This work would take place during the 23/24 financial year and would be brought

		understand if they should be retained within the portfolio or not.	forward to Members to understand priorities.
V	Resources should be allocated to ensure the council continues to deliver more than the minimum requirement of 10% for fire safety checks in homes.	Members raised concerns over the inspection level of just 10% of block fire doors per annum. It was confirmed that whilst this was the target was set under legislation, the service set considerably tougher targets in-house. The Task Group felt that resources should be allocated to this to ensure a higher inspection level continued. .	MT agreed the recommendation. Resources have been allocated accordingly and the review would set an appropriate target. 10% was a minimum requirement, but the Council would be setting targets well in excess of this.
VI	A presentation is provided to the wider council regarding the HRA.	Members felt that it had been very useful to have greater insight into the operation of the Housing team as well as to understand the constraints on budgets. It was suggested that the knowledge was conveyed to other Members via subsequent presentations.	MT agreed the recommendation. This was something that would be provided for the new Administration and as part of the new Members Induction programme in 23/24.

Wrap Up

9. To conclude the Budget Scrutiny sessions, the Chairman of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group gave the opportunity for Members to discuss any outstanding issues regarding the budget and a summary presentation was shown to Members to relay some of the key findings of the last few budget scrutiny meetings.

Conclusion

10. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group have considered the 2023/24 draft budget proposals together with the council's financial risks. The Task Group have made a number of recommendations, for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider making to the Cabinet.

Contact and Email

11. Abi Sheppard, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330394

Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – 8th December 2022 (Budget Scrutiny 1)

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);

Cllrs. Barrett, Chilton, Hayward, Ledger.

Also in Attendance:

Cllrs. Burgess, Harman, Shorter, Spain, Wright.

Also Present:

Service Lead Finance, Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer, Senior Accountant, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance.

1 Election of Chairman

- 1.1 The Task Group elected Cllr. Ovenden as Chairman.

2 Notes of the previous meetings

- 2.1 The Task Group agreed that the Minutes of the BSTG Meeting on the 11th January 2022 were an accurate record.

3 Draft Budget Report 2023/24

- 3.1 The Draft Budget report was introduced and Members were invited to identify any areas they felt required extra detail and/or clarification at subsequent meetings:
- A Member asked how much of the outturn forecast and deficit was due to the interest rise in the current year. The Service Lead Finance responded that the pressure on the 2022/23 year was circa £500,000. As the strategy was changed to reflect economic climate, the actual pressure arose where the property company was not able to progress developments. He added that the organization had a good level of reserves and it was proposed to fund the deficit from reserves in the 2023/24 budget. However, this could not be continued in future years and a different approach would be required moving forward.
 - Members noted that the proposed savings had not been identified at this stage but that it would be crucial to secure these savings in the coming year. The Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Digital emphasized that a programme was currently in train to discuss the delivery of savings and that this work would need to be continued by the next administration. The Chairman pointed out that any

new Administration would review, and possibly amend, the existing budget.

- The Chairman clarified that the role of the Task Group was to scrutinize the draft budget within the report, and to identify areas of risk to the budget where further information and scrutiny was required. He pointed out that Cabinet were still in the process of considering the draft budget at this stage.
- Members were in agreement on the importance of further scrutiny of the Housing and Homelessness budget.
- Members discussed a possible increase in Council Tax and noted that authorities were now obliged to be self-funding. Members recognized the current period of financial hardship for residents, but also considered that an increase in Council Tax was an opportunity to generate income for the authority. A Member pointed out that it was not necessary to increase Council Tax every year, but an increase this year could be useful in managing the budget pressures ahead. Members were aware that an increase in Council Tax could lead to further difficulties in collecting payments, and this had to be considered as a factor when making a decision. The Service Lead Finance also advised Members that income streams were not currently keeping pace with expenditure. The more reserves were used to finance the deficit, the less funds were available for investment and hence a lower income could be achieved.
- The Chairman pointed out that the report did not make clear that savings would be used to rebuild the authority's financial situation as the economy improved in future. He asked the Service Lead Finance to clarify this point within the report before it was finalized.
- The Task Group discussed the issue of unidentified savings and agreed that at this point it was not practicable to insist that savings were identified, although it was desirable for clarity on this point as soon as possible. Members recognized that savings were not currently required to make this budget deliverable, but that they were a lynchpin of the authority's financial management next year.

Recommendations

It was agreed that the Task Group would review the following areas:

- **Corporate property maintenance programme risks**
- **Commercial property portfolio risk**
- **HRA maintenance programme**
- **Homelessness provision and housing options – including update on Henwood**
- **Current borrowing levels and forecasts - Arlingclose presentation**
- **Reserves position**
- **Savings to be identified – update where appropriate**

- **Planning paper – regarding how the service has changed during the last year, what is happening now and are they comfortable with the budget going forward.**

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees

This page is intentionally left blank

Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – 9th January 2023 (Budget Scrutiny 2)

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chair);

Cllrs. Chilton, Hayward, Howard and Ledger.

Also in Attendance:

Cllrs. Forest, Shorter.

Also Present:

Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation, Head of Policy and Performance, Service Lead Finance, Senior Accountant, Estates Manager, Estates and Facilities Manager, Property Building Services Manager, Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant, Senior Member Services Officer.

1 Environment, Property & Recreation - Commercial Property Portfolio Risk & Corporate Property Maintenance Programme Risks

- 1.1 The Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation drew attention to the report contained within the agenda papers and using a PowerPoint Presentation highlighted the diverse range within the portfolio and the risks contained within. The Council's property holdings included; two industrial estates, the Park Mall shopping centre, Elwick Place, offices, car parks, two Windmills and garage blocks. Specialist teams managed these assets and ensured that the portfolio was balanced and in line with the Council's risk appetite. These teams would also assess and make recommendations on whether the Council should maintain or dispose of assets. A contract had recently been awarded to Collier Stevens to undertake condition surveys on all of the assets within the portfolio with a view to a 5yr planned maintenance schedule being prepared. This work would be shared with Councillors as it became available.
- 1.2 Whilst there had been a nationwide decrease in office rentals, there had been an upshift in light industrial/commercial units, with waiting lists at Ellingham. Whilst the portfolio was diverse this itself reduced the risk because there was a greater constancy of income. Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) meant that it was likely that all properties would be required to meet a minimum standard of C by 2027 with a proposal of B by 2030, currently energy white paper going through parliament. The aim was for all to meet B by 2027 to ensure that the work was completed once but it was recognized that this would involve a lot of work.

- 1.3 The work undertaken by the Economic Regeneration and Investment Board (ERIB) was highlighted and the Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation welcomed Councillors bringing forward any opportunities for review. It was suggested that ERIB were provided with more detail and training on the property portfolio moving forward in order that all acquisitions and disposals were considered with a sound understanding of not only the individual risks and opportunities but the impact on the wider portfolio as a whole. The Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation gave examples of voids and the work that was being undertaken to reduce these, in particular in Park Mall.
- 1.4 The item was opened up to the Task Group and the following responses were given to questions/comments:-
- The former NCP car park roof was closed and not the lower floor due to an increase in cars using the roof which in turn would increase water problems pushing through the asphalt and then tracking into the shops below. Works were ongoing to try to improve the situation.
 - The rebating of business rates was complex and was required to be done by way of formal rating appeals submitted through the Valuation Office Agency, it was not within the gift of the Council.
 - The mechanisms on the lifts at Edinburgh Road had been repaired and there was a cleaning schedule in place, however this would be re-assessed following concerns raised by Councillors.
 - Leases for tenancies were individual and would have their own renewal dates. These were set when tenancies were taken out and examples of these were given.
 - There was scope to look at the offer of light industrial units within the portfolio and how this could be increased.
 - The subsidy given to Tenterden Leisure Centre was discussed in detail, Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation advised that this was under review and a paper in order to reduce the support would be provided to Directors in the coming weeks and Members would be updated. The Service Lead Finance advised that a tender process had been underway when the Coronavirus Pandemic struck and the incumbent tenant had only agreed to extend based on extension of subsidy support, as the Operator was not prepared to take any risk on the contract extension in the economic climate.
 - Officers were not always aware of issues in relation to leaseholders either defaulting or wishing to exit their leases early, quite often these discussions took place with financial advisors first. It was noted that at times the first indication of an issue would be when the Council was approached as part of a CVA.
 - No information was available to say that International House had not been impacted by the removal of the Eurostar service from Ashford alone.
 - The future of the Civic Centre was discussed with work needed to assess whether it should be retained as part of the portfolio or not.

Councillor Ovenden (Chair)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services:
Telephone: 01233 330499 Email: membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: <http://ashford.moderngov.co.uk>

This page is intentionally left blank

Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – 10 January 2023 (Budget Scrutiny 3)

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);

Cllrs. Chilton, Harman, Howard, Ledger.

Apologies for absence:

Apologies had been received from Cllr. Hayward.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr. Harman was present in substitution for Cllr. Hayward.

Also in Attendance:

Cllr. Shorter

Also Present:

Director of Customer, Technology and Finance; Service Lead Finance; Senior Accountant; Accountant; Assistant Director Housing; Housing Development and Regeneration Manager; Development Partnership Manager; Housing Asset Manager; Head of Policy and Performance; Policy and Scrutiny Officer; Member Services Officer; Policy and Democratic Services Assistant.

1 Housing - HRA Maintenance programme

- 1.1 The Group had requested further information on the Maintenance programme aspect of the Housing Revenue Business plan.
- 1.2 The Housing Asset Manager, in conjunction with the Assistant Director Housing, gave a presentation, explaining how decisions were made regarding the maintenance and upgrade of the housing stock, and the challenges and pressures of the present legislative and economic climate to successfully provide safe, comfortable and sustainable homes. A 30-year plan of capital works had been formulated, which was continuously monitored to ensure available HRA resources were being deployed to meet Decent Homes standard and above in a timely

manner. Focus would always be on compliance to ensure customer safety; programmes to monitor safety risk and correct any defects quickly were already in place, using specialist contractors and specifically-trained Officers. ABC owned no blocks over two stories where unsafe cladding had been installed. The stock was in good condition overall, and knowledge of that condition was strong, so projection of need could be assessed, but the projects required flexibility to allow for any change in prioritisation due to arising unknowns. A peppercorn approach to planned works did increase costs. Maintaining rental income was crucial to finance the projects, which presented challenges in the current economic climate of hardship for many customers; the focus was on advice and support at an early stage to mitigate debt and eviction; a 1% increase in arrears equated to a loss of £275K to the HRA. Costs for materials and labour had increased, exacerbated by Covid19 and the conflict in Ukraine; the repairs contractor was experiencing difficulties in delivering works within the financial confines of the contract. The delay to planned internal works caused by the pandemic was to be addressed. New legislation progressing through Parliament would require all social landlords to involve customers in decision-making processes that affected their homes and neighbourhoods, evidencing service delivery, reduction of any associated stigma, a compassionate attitude and respect; Tenant Satisfaction Measures would be introduced to evidence this. Housing Officers would be more visible on site in their patches, be more alert to customer need and trained to carry out regular block inspections to assess safety compliance and repair requirements, including at least 10% of fire doors per annum. Whilst maintenance service complaints were minimal, disrepair claims were increasing. Repairs Inspectors were to be upskilled where necessary to diagnose causes of damp, condensation and mould, whilst maintaining comprehensive property records; various methods of customer education to minimise the likelihood of occurrence of mould were being considered. Provision of a device called Switchee was being investigated. This functioned as a smart thermostat to regulate energy consumption whilst gathering useful data for the landlord to monitor living conditions in real time; initial investigations indicated the duration of time for return on the investment was favourable. Business cases for additional officer resource were being prepared.

- 1.3 To help achieve an EPC rating of C across the stock, a bid had been made for a grant of £8m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, a decision on which was imminent. Success would accelerate eligible works currently identified in the 30-year plan, which otherwise might need to be recalibrated into future work programmes. The strategy to improve affordable warmth, combat fuel poverty and reduce the carbon footprint of homes was to focus on retrofit measures under 'Fabric First' to raise thermal values, with improved insulation capturing and containing any heat generated, rather than on energy consumption reduction measures which incurred an on-going maintenance and renewal cost. Homes with

the lowest rating would be upgraded first, and works would be scheduled in a logical order to prevent expensive revisits in subsequent years.

- 1.4 The demand for disabled adaptation works had significantly increased, and was often of a complex nature to meet an individual's specific need. The aging population was a contributing factor, and a lack of suitably-adapted move-on property meant requests to improve accessibility of the current home had spiralled. Occupational Therapists were now requesting whole-property holistic adaptations, rather than just works to discrete areas. This could prove challenging and costly due to existing layouts and construction restraints. Adaptations with a mechanical or electrical element also had to be funded in terms of repair, servicing, insurance and replacement costs. An overspend was likely in the current financial year, and consideration to increasing this budget for future years was required.
- 1.5 The Officers were thanked for the presentation and explanations. A Member asked if the expectation was for a continued rise in adaptation requests and if adaptations were reversed when the property was vacated. The Asset Manager believed that requests were likely to continue to increase. The Assistant Director Housing confirmed, as much as practicable, new customers with similar needs were matched to adapted properties, or existing customers with similar needs offered a transfer, but inevitably there was sometimes a requirement to remove the adaptation on re-let.
- 1.6 A Member asked if the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures would apply to all social landlords and if responsibility to engage would fall on front-line staff; the Assistant Director Housing confirmed that was the case. As a result of the Grenfell fire tragedy, the new legislation implementation would require a culture shift to put the customer at the centre of provision, to meaningfully engage on decision-making, and to evidence that to the Housing Regulator inspectors in the future. In preparation, Housing staff had been working with Tpas (Tenant Participation Service), a consultancy with strong experience in the best methods of engagement. Action plans would be prepared to identify and rectify any areas of underperformance.
- 1.7 A Member considered there to be a high risk to continued asset quality, as any shortfall in the rental income impacted directly on the planned works and maintenance funding. It seemed a high reliance was being placed on grant funding to deliver the proposed schedule. The Assistant Director Housing answered that the department operated like a small business, closely and regularly monitoring available resources to enable delivery, and adjustments to the plan were made where necessary. She reiterated that the safety of customers would always take precedence and there were no concerns that a standard above Decent Homes could not be guaranteed.
- 1.8 A Member commented that void turnaround was not always swift and

straightforward, and that regular maintenance and tenancy management was key to keeping a home and its surroundings in good condition. The Assistant Director Housing believed that the strategy of increased Officer presence on site would improve early identification of concerns and encouraged Members to assist in highlighting any issues; the intention was to work more closely with communities in future.

- 1.9 A Member noted the positive impact of delivering suitable adaptations that allowed disabled customers to remain in their current locality, where other support measures were likely already in place, rather than offer an already-adapted home in another area. The Asset Manager provided an example of where provision outside of policy conditions had been made for a customer couple for that reason, emphasising the need to look at all cases on an individual basis, and perhaps agree with the customer the scope of what was realistically possible or not, long-term.
- 1.10 In response to a query from the Chair, the Assistant Director Housing confirmed that the entire HRA budget plan was reviewed in the case of any shortfall in income, not just planned works funding. There was no built-in contingency plan or framework as such, but regular monitoring meant issues were quickly identified and adjustments made to spread spend if necessary. The Service Lead Finance further confirmed that close monitoring and transfer of works from on-going revenue budgets into capital works programmes reduced borrowing costs, to help make the 30-year plan deliverable over its lifetime. The budget did contain recognition of projected loss of income from voids and rent restrictions. The HRA also had some reserves to help smooth in-year movements, offer resilience and deliver to the prescribed model.
- 1.11 A Member had concerns regarding the inspection of just 10% of block fire doors per annum. The Housing Asset Manager confirmed that, whilst this was the target to be set under legislation, the intention was to set considerably tougher targets in-house. Facilitating access to homes was a possible constraint to achievement.
- 1.12 Members thanked Officers for the insight into the operations of the Housing team and expressed a wish that the knowledge was conveyed to other Members via subsequent presentations. The Assistant Director Housing confirmed that internal discussions were taking place regarding information-sharing methods by Council services with Members, to be put in place following the elections in May 2023.

2 Housing – Homelessness provision and housing options - including update on Henwood

- 2.1 The Group had requested further information on the Homelessness

funding aspect of the Housing Revenue Business plan.

- 2.2 The Assistant Director gave a presentation, explaining that the Housing Options team were tasked with managing housing need, via the waiting list, temporary accommodation, void properties and properties owned by private landlords and managed by ABC Lettings. The need for social housing was steadily increasing, the demand for affordable rented housing rising due to high private rental costs; benefits were sometimes capped or required top-up. ABC Lettings negotiated hard with their landlords to keep their rents realistic in the current economic climate. Some landlords were selling their properties, as mortgage repayments became unaffordable due to inflation and new regulations discouraged them to continue to supply rental accommodation. The Stodmarsh issue had stalled much new development, negatively affecting supply, and developers prioritised the offer of shared ownership to registered providers under Section 106 conditions, rather than rental stock. The number of families presenting with complex needs was increasing, requiring Officers to think creatively to help them. There was a strong perception that council stock was limitless and readily available. Approximately 45 households were housed each month in 2022, a balance of waiting list applicants, transfers and re-homing from temporary accommodation. The team received on average around 200 new applications each month. Increased supply depended largely on new build and shortening void periods. The service was reviewed in 2021/22, with a report to Members, consequent re-structuring and action planning. Grant funding was being maximised, for example that available for rough sleepers, and new sources of good-quality temporary housing solutions were being investigated. Early intervention to prevent homelessness had not been effective; it was thought the sometimes-sudden shift in economic circumstances, the knowledge that private rental accommodation was likely to be more expensive, and the lack of supply to meet demand were contributing factors. More were presenting at the 'relief' stage, where they were about to become homeless, or already without accommodation. Nevertheless, the plan had assisted in managing the situation, which could have been much worse if the measures had not been put in place. There had been a significant rise in the need for one-bed homes, and for single occupants with complex needs, of which the supply was very low. A placements profile for September 2022 showed that 163 households were then in temporary accommodation, of which only council-owned and rough sleeper homes could be provided at reasonable cost. There had been a rise in the net spend on homelessness.
- 2.3 The development at Henwood would provide 23 units of self-contained temporary accommodation, which would significantly reduce costs. The delivery of the project had seen a delay but once ready to be occupied in March 2024, would quickly recoup the build costs of £4.7m. The saving was projected at around £360K per annum.

- 2.4 The Chair asked if those savings included the cost of the build, which was confirmed by the Assistant Director Housing, as the cost of delivering the building was part of the maintenance loan to cover the running of the scheme.
- 2.5 A Member asked about the limiting factors to delivering similar schemes. The Assistant Director Housing responded that they had to be mindful that numbers needing temporary housing fluctuated; the lack of supply of move-on homes for permanent accommodation had a big effect, as it was important to maintain the flow onwards. This scheme was not subject to Stodmarsh constraints as it could be demonstrated that it was not increasing the numbers of those already housed elsewhere in Ashford, but other development of permanent homes on hold due to Stodmarsh was limiting supply. It was also challenging to identify suitable sites to develop that stacked up financially. The Housing Development and Regeneration Manager added that Christchurch House and Christchurch Lodge had been relatively-expensively converted from other prior usage, with communal facilities, a type of accommodation not preferred nationally now by Homes England. Conversations with the Local Planning Authority were undertaken to ensure sites were located close to existing services in the community. Every potential site opportunity was explored even though the preference would be for purpose-built homes. The Member commented that purely on a budgetary basis, the preference for Henwood-style temporary accommodation made sense, particularly since if it was not needed, it could easily be converted to alternative use and land purchase for this purpose should be pursued.
- 2.6 The Chair believed a balance needed to be struck between the potential need for more temporary accommodation and the apparent lack of move-on homes. The rise in homelessness was a drain on the General Fund rather than the HRA. He asked what priority was being given to the provision of one-bed accommodation from the HRA. The Assistant Director Housing replied that potential site opportunities were being explored, as it was recognised that a solution to the Stodmarsh issue would soon be found. The provision of more affordable rented homes was the correct strategy to resolve the homelessness issue.
- 2.7 A Member commented that such background information would be useful to Members on the Planning Committee, when Council-led applications were presented to them for consideration. It would also help if Members were included in pre-planning discussions to better understand the reasons for the application. The Assistant Director Housing replied that Housing worked closely with Planning Team colleagues, to include relevant information in the reports. The Chair asked for greater consideration to be made to including Members into early development conversations and presentations, to which the Assistant Director Housing agreed.
- 2.8 Members again praised the presentation and the comprehensive

information imparted. It had been very useful to have greater insight into the operation of the Housing team as well as to understand the constraints on budgets.

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact
membersservices@ashford.gov.uk Agendas, Reports and Minutes are
available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees

Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – 12th January 2023 (Budget Scrutiny 4)

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);

Cllrs. W. Howard, Ledger.

Apologies:

Cllrs Chilton, Hayward

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr. Harman was present in substitution for Cllr. Hayward.

Also in Attendance:

Cllrs. Harman, Shorter, Wright.

Also Present:

Mark Pickering – Arlingclose

Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Policy & Performance, Service Lead Finance, Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Senior Accountant, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant, Member Services Officer, Director of Customer, Technology & Finance

1 Finance, IT & Digital – Borrowing and Reserves

- 1.1 Mark Pickering from Arlingclose Financial Consultancy delivered a presentation to the Task Group summarising the current financial situation on a national and global scale. The presentation highlighted political influences, including the change in leadership within the UK Government and the war in Ukraine, and the impact of these events on the Credit Default Swaps market. The presentation examined the result of increasing inflation on the Consumer Price Index and real average earnings growth and the resulting recession. In addition, house prices and unemployment were also identified as key indicators of consumer confidence. Mark went onto say that interest rates were anticipated to fall in Spring 2024, and very gradually thereafter. This slow and steady decrease was good news because it provided some stability and certainty in a market that was very tentative. Capital and borrowing were covered, as well as the question around whether the Council would wish to expose themselves to the current market risk, but he added that for the time being, those investments continued to deliver robust income and supported the revenue budget. Generally, all statistics presently were uncertain, which made forecasting base rates very difficult.
- 1.2 The Chairman thanked Mark for the comprehensive presentation on what was often a convoluted topic, which he had explained clearly and concisely to Members.

- 1.3 The Service Lead Finance explained that the impact of the current financial crisis was being felt not just around borrowing, but also on the wider organization including Revenues & Benefits in terms of Council Tax/Business Rates arrears and Housing with an increase in homelessness and rent arrears. Despite the forecast rates expected to reach 4.25%, it was felt that the Council would still be able to work within the existing budget, with a view to managing the Capital Programme more efficiently and effectively. Concerning the Capital Financing Requirement, this encompassed Newtown Works, loans of the property company and Henwood. Appendix B highlighted the amount of debt outstanding per asset, whilst Appendix C provided statistics on borrowing forecast for year-end. The Deputy Chief Executive added that it was important to consider the lifespan of some of those capital projects and the associated liability; e.g., the Newtown Works project would not be held as a liability on the balance sheet for a long time as once completed, units would be sold and contribute to paying off the loan.
- 1.4 A Member asked whether the Council could borrow less, and whether consideration had been given to what could be sold in order to reduce the interest payments and the loans, given the current financial difficulties. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that in simple terms, the Council could spend less to help tackle the deficit. He explained that they were revisiting the Capital Programme, deciding which items would still go ahead, and which would be put on hold, taking into account the rise in interest rates and costs. Phasing the Capital Programme was also an option to reduce the risk exposure. He agreed that selling assets was another possibility, although many assets were delivering purposes, and the consequences of selling them would need to be deliberated. The Chairman added that caution was needed for all these considerations, as there were pros and cons to each and the Arlingclose presentation forecast the crisis levelling out by the end of the year. The Portfolio Holder reflected on the due diligence carried out at the initiation of any project, and that consideration (in a different guise) should be continuous as the project continued to be delivered and the finance circumstances around it changed. He agreed with the Chairman that he too would be reluctant to embark on a knee jerk response, where assets were sold and projects put on hold and then in five years' time the Council regret it. He commended the Treasury and Financial Team for their professional approach over the years.
- 1.5 The discussion then focused on Reserves and it was noted that Central Government was driving questions around Local Authority levels of reserves; in particular why they existed and what they contained. The Deputy Chief Exec explained that this was strange seeing as the figures were transparent and published in the Councils final accounts and all Government returns. He felt there was a feeling in Government that Authorities should use a mixture of reserves and tax savings to deliver. Much of the reform that had happened in the last 10/15 years within Local Government finance had been a risk transfer and the Council had been encouraged to generate more income that shifted more risk into income streams, and ultimately the increase in risk had resulted in more reserves. The Finance Service Lead explained that there would be a reduction within the reserves pot in order to fund next year's deficit, but realistically that would only be sufficient for 2023 and 2024, and then the reserves would run out. The key message was to make sure the savings proposals were delivered, brought forward and supported.

2 Finance, IT & Digital – Savings

- 2.1 The Director of Customer, Technology & Finance introduced this item and explained that Assistant Directors and Heads of Service had been asked to review their services and

separate out statutory services and discretionary services, and from there were asked to put down ideas where savings could be made. There were some quick wins where budgets could be reduced via smaller things that were not deemed vital and this would provide a saving of around £200,000. There were other saving ideas, but these were subject to whether the current administration would want to take those now or for the new administration in the future. Management had identified around £2.3 million savings, and all of these ideas would be put forward to Cabinet on 23rd February. The Chairman added that the Task Group was currently looking at the draft budget, which showed the deficit being dealt with from reserves, so hearing about savings was an added bonus, and although there would inevitably be some funding from reserves, it would not be to the level that was outlined in the draft budget. The programme of dates was shared for the Task Group to see.

- 2.2 A question was asked about the long-term effects of continuous cuts. The Director of Customer, Technology & Finance described how over the last 10 years Central Government had cut grants and applied caps, and if those types of funding sources continued to diminish, then there could come a point when the Council would only be able to deliver core statutory functions, and discretionary services would cease. The Portfolio Holder reinforced his feelings that this was exactly the reason to maintain a vision of the long game concerning ABC's investment programme. The Chairman highlighted that the draft budget offered a full term in which the Council and new administration would have the chance to review, react and plan forward. Depletion of the reserves was to be expected during this period of financial and political uncertainty, but certainly, within the next 12-24 months, a new strategy would be developed and implemented. A recommendation to monitor the budget over the next 12 months would be put forward. The Chairman added that difficult political decisions would need to be made, and these may not benefit every resident of the Borough.

3 Wrap Up and Next Steps

- 3.1 The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced this item, which provided Members with a summary of the three previous Budget Scrutiny meetings and listed the recommendations to be taken forward to Cabinet. Members were asked for any additional comments and the Chairman noted that some recommendations were supplementary (non-financial) and therefore could be pushed to the end of the list.
- 3.2 A summary report containing the recommendations and Minutes would be sent to the O&S Committee for approval on 14th February 2023. The Final Report would then be submitted to Cabinet on 23rd February 2023.

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact membersservices@ashford.gov.uk Agendas,
Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees

This page is intentionally left blank



Agenda Item No: 5

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14th February 2022

Report Title: Final Report of the O&S Task Group's Review of the Planning IT System Delivery

Report Author: Abi Sheppard
Job Title: Policy and Scrutiny Officer

O&S Task Group Chairman: Cllr. N Ovenden

Summary: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review the lessons learnt during the project to deliver the new Planning IT System with Arcus Global. The Group also wanted to ensure that where issues had been experienced they were not repeated for future transformation projects.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: The Task Group would like to endorse the following recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- I. Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.
- II. Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.
- III. Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade.
- IV. Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.
- V. Consultation with external customers should take

place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.

- VI. PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.
- VII. Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.
- VIII. System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.

Policy Overview:

Financial Implications: There are no financial implications resulting from the review.

Legal Implications: There are no legal implications resulting from the review.

Equalities Impact Assessment: Not Required

Data Protection Impact Assessment: Not Required

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement): Not Required

Sustainability Implications: Not Required

Other Material Implications: Not Required

Exempt from Publication: NO

Background Papers: None

Contact: Abi Sheppard
Abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 330394)

Report Title: Final Report of the O&S Task Group's Review of the Planning IT System Delivery

Foreword from the Task Group Chairman

1. In this report, the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group presents its findings and recommendations from the review that examined how the new planning IT system was delivered at the council.
2. The review has highlighted that there were issues during the delivery of the Arcus Global system, some of which could have been avoided. The Witness Sessions, conducted during the review, allowed for in depth discussions over each stage of the project and I would like to commend Officers for working tirelessly on what was a challenging project and note the endeavours of all involved. One of the key lessons learnt was to ensure that enough resources are in place for future large scale projects. Although the system did get to the 'go live' stage, the pressure to do this compromised other important aspects of the project such as external consultation. Additionally, the Task Group felt that the reputational risk of the project was overlooked because the focus of the project was not developed with the customer in mind.
3. The findings are a reflection of discussions conducted between Councillors and key Officers involved in the project. I would like to acknowledge the time and effort dedicated from Task Group Members, Portfolio Holders and Officers to attend meetings and participate in discussions.

Introduction and Background

4. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified that there had been issues with the delivery of the new planning IT system with Arcus Global. It was agreed that a review should be prioritised in the work programme and undertaken by a dedicated Task and Finish Group.
5. The aim for the review was to understand what issues had been experienced during the project and also what lessons could be taken forward in future transformation projects and system rollouts. In particular, Members were aware of plans in 2023 to develop the Arcus Global system further with the Planning and Development Service and also upgrade the system used by the Safety and Wellbeing Service. Therefore, it was important for the Task Group to understand the lessons that could be learnt from the delivery of the planning IT system project.

Review Scope

6. The Task Group assembled 5 Members; Cllr Ovenden (Chair), Cllr. Ledger, Cllr. Harman, Cllr. Mulholland and Cllr. Hayward to review the success of the project delivery of the new IT system in the Planning and Development service and, if required, make some recommendations to improve the process for future system rollouts or projects.
7. A scope was initially compiled for the review to establish where scrutiny could be most beneficial. During discussions about the scope, it was important to Members that the purpose of the review was not to apportion blame for issues that occurred throughout the project, but to understand any lessons that could be learnt to inform similar projects in future.
8. The Task Group agreed that speaking to key individuals involved in the project would be the best way to understand issues completely. It was proposed that three or four 'Witness Sessions' would take place for Members to have a question and answer style discussion with the;
 - a. Project Manager
 - b. Assistant Director for Planning and Development
 - c. Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development
 - d. Head of IT
 - e. Digital Transformation Manager
 - f. External consultant
 - g. Main contact from Arcus Global
9. The scope also identified a set of questions which were provided to the witnesses in advance to allow them time to prepare and aimed to guide discussion with Members at the Task Group meetings.
10. The Task Group identified the following questions for the Witness Sessions:
 - a. What were downfalls of the old system from an internal and external customer Point Of View and what did Arcus do to improve on them?
 - b. What resources were allocated at the beginning of the project and was this sufficient?
 - c. What have been the main issues during the project delivery of the Arcus Global system?
 - d. How have the issues identified been dealt with and were they easy to resolve?
 - e. What were the benefits and disbenefits of a service-led project management approach?
 - f. Were customers (including parish council's) consulted during the implementation process?
 - g. What have been the barriers to pulling across more streamlined data?

- h. What IT support was put in place for the project?
 - i. What learning has been explored from other councils and how has it been implemented?
11. External customer's direct feedback would not be required for this review as there were separate forums for customers to put their view forward. For example, Parish Councils had a training session scheduled separately on how to use the system. Members of the Task Group would also represent views of external users.

Review Findings

12. A number of key issues during delivery of the new Planning IT System were identified by the Task Group during the review. Issues have been categories within four main areas;
- 13.
- a. Project Team Resourcing
 - b. User Testing and Data Migration
 - c. External Customer Experience
 - d. Governance and Communications

Project Team Resourcing

14. A main concern raised during the Witness Sessions related to the size of the project team in comparison to the size of the project. It was found that some officers who were key to delivering the project, had multiple work streams and it became difficult for them to manage the demands of the project and the running of the Planning Service. This indicated that the pressures of multiple work streams may have impacted officer's ability to deliver the project successfully, maximising the full benefits of the system. It was noted other authorities, that had recently implemented the same system, had dedicated teams of Officers in place to implement a project of this scale and this was identified as a key lesson to take forward from the review. The suggestion was made that better scoping of officer's time during the initial stages of a project should be undertaken to ensure realistic expectations over timings of project delivery and manageable workloads for officers. This would have made it evident that dedicated project management support was necessary. Overall, the Task Group agreed that more resources should be allocated to certain projects undertaken in future at the council. For example, those of particular importance to customers or those with significant financial or reputational risk. **(Recommendation V)**
15. Furthermore, Members agreed that the Project Manager should not be an additional role to normal duties for large-scale projects and should be considered a separate role. The review panel noted there was not a requirement for the Project Manager to have any professional project management qualifications. Although the hard work and commitment by the project team to implement the new system was acknowledged, it may have

been advantageous for the lead Officer to have project management qualifications to help move the project forward. **(Recommendation I)**

User Testing and Data Migration

16. The Witness Sessions identified that there were additional pressures on Officers to deliver the project and 'go live' within a set timeframe.
17. As part of the transition from one system to another, the migration of data was anticipated. The Task Group discussed the migration of legacy data and the time taken to do this part of the project. Issues arose around what data would be taken over and what wouldn't, for example, historic data. Due to time pressures of the project, the decision was made to migrate all of the data across. This went against the advice of the council's Corporate Information Governance Group and caused unexpected delays due to the additional time required to transfer the large set of data. The Task Group suggested that unnecessary and historic data should be identified during the early stages of a project and not migrated. This would avoid time delays, ensure a smoother transition process and be in line with the council's data protection and retention policies. **(Recommendation II)**
18. Further issues were identified in regards to the User Acceptance Testing (UAT) conducted internally by Planning Officers. The purpose of conducting UAT was to test how well the system worked, raise any issues and resolve them prior to the system going live. It was suggested that there was not enough importance placed on the UAT due to the timescale pressures to get the system live. Additionally, there may have not been enough responsibility assigned to officers involved in user groups to ensure they understood the importance of the testing and prioritised it alongside their daily tasks. This resulted in incomplete testing and issues not being resolved prior to the go live date. Members agreed that explicit testing should be carried out with user groups and communicated to the project manager in order for issues to be understood and resolved in advance of going live with a new system. **(Recommendation III, IV)**

External Customer Experience

19. The Task Group considered the implementation of the public facing (external customer) element of the Arcus Global system in detail. Following the system go-live date, a number of issues were identified with the public system and this resulted in negative feedback from some members of the public who used the system. An external survey was conducted to registered users of the Consultee Portal (including Members) of which 29 responses were received. The results found that 72% of respondents rated the usability of the system as only 1 or 2 out of 5 (1 being bad – 5 being good). When asked to elaborate on the scoring, a key issue highlighted by respondents was that the system was confusing.
20. Overall, it was felt that the design of the system focussed on the needs of the Planning Service in the first instance. Although the back-office element of the system was the most significant part to implement, this suggested to the Task Group that the project was not designed with the customer in mind. It also

suggested that the reputational risk associated with the public facing part of the system had not been sufficiently considered.

21. The Task Group also found that external consultation may not have been prioritised, in light of the pressure to get the system live. Members suggested that if effective consultation with customers had taken place, it was likely to have reduced the issues that arose following the go live date. However, due to the focus on getting the system to the point of go live, customer consultation had not been addressed. The group suggested that consultation with external customers at the very outset was vital when implementing a new system of this size, particularly when the system would be used heavily by customers, as was the case with the planning system. The reputational risk to the council also needed to be fully understood and mitigated against. It was also recommended that external consultation should take place during the initial stages of a project and then inform its delivery. In order to achieve this, user groups would need to be set up from the outset of a project and their feedback incorporated going forward to ensure it is customer focused throughout. **(Recommendation VI)**

Governance and Communications

22. The Task Group wanted to understand how project updates were being communicated and overseen by the council's senior management. Project updates were received by the Programme Management Group (PMG) at multiple points during the project. Members questioned why the decision had been made to go live despite issues raised in regards to the data migration and UAT. It was found that the issues were advised within project updates to PMG, however, assurance had been given that these risks were manageable. The Task Group agreed that the decision to go live should be more rigorously challenged by PMG when receiving project updates to ensure that timescales were deliverable and are not detrimental to the project outcomes.
23. The Task Group questioned the governance of the project further and asked specifically what arrangements were in place for project reporting. Although several project updates were brought forward to PMG by the Project Manager throughout the duration of the project, there were no specific arrangements in place to ensure the group were updated at milestone points in the project. For example, it was suggested that PMG should clarify the frequency of highlight reporting to PMG to set out the key risks and challenges of the project at that time. **(Recommendation VII)**
24. Furthermore, the Task Group also discussed how Portfolio Holders were kept updated on the progress of the project. It was found that some key issues were not communicated effectively to the relevant Portfolio Holder, in particular its scope and the impact that a new system could have on the council's customers. Members suggested that regular updates on the status of a project should be in place between the lead Service and Portfolio Holder to ensure there is Member oversight of project delivery. **(Recommendation VIII)**

25. Communications of some project issues relating to the external user experience were also not escalated. The Task Group found that these issues were not picked up at senior management level due to the lack of focus around customer experience. It was proposed that to improve system rollouts in future, they should be planned around improving the customer experience and the processes be mapped accordingly with this in mind.
26. Furthermore, it was found that a communications plan had been put in place initially, however, this was not fully implemented for the duration of the project. It was explained to the Task Group that the communications team had been involved at an early stage but the plan was not revisited when the 'go live' was introduced. Members agreed that a strong communications plan was essential for helping system users to smoothly transition from one system to another.
(Recommendation IX)

Conclusion

27. The implementation of the Arcus Global planning system was a challenging project which required a lot of work undertaken to get the system live. The Witness Sessions found that, ultimately, the time pressure to get the system live meant that some important processes were overlooked. The Task Group noted that testing and consultation were two areas that were not carried out thoroughly and therefore issues were not properly reported or resolved prior to the system going live. A key lesson to be learnt from this would be to ensure that system rollouts are tested appropriately and are developed with the customer in mind.
28. Furthermore, lessons could also be learnt around ensuring that all large scale projects in future have a dedicated team to deliver them. This would prevent Officers having to balance the workload on top of normal duties in their service. The Task Group also concluded that there could have been greater challenge on issues at a senior management level and so the lesson to be learnt here would be to ensure that governance arrangements of projects are clearly outlined by the council's PMG.
29. The Task Group finalised their conclusions in a Wrap Up meeting. The recommendations reflect key points raised from discussions held during Witness Sessions over the course of the review. The recommendations aim to improve the process for future large scale projects and system roll outs. Following approval from Cabinet, it was proposed that the Task Group could receive updates on the next phase of system upgrades with Arcus Global in the Planning and Development Service and Safety and Wellbeing Service.

Recommendations

30. The Task Group would like to endorse the following recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
 - i. Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.

- ii. Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.
- iii. Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade.
- iv. Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.
- v. Consultation with external customers should take place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.
- vi. PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.
- vii. Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.
- viii. System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.

Contact and Email

31. Abi Sheppard, *Policy and Scrutiny Officer*
abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk
Tel: 01233 330394

MT Advice Sheet – Delivery of Planning IT System Review

The O&S Committee recommend to the Cabinet that:	MT Advice to Cabinet:
i. Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.	Approved. MT agreed that an appropriate project manager resource should be allocated to strategic projects.
ii. Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.	Approved. MT supported the idea to have a data retention policy in place to assist projects that involve the migration of data.
iii. Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade	Approved. It was agreed that user testing was key for implementation or upgrades of systems in future and PMG should receive detailed information on this.
iv. Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.	Approved. MT supported the recommendation.
v. Consultation with external customers should take place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.	Approved. MT supported the recommendation
vi. PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.	Approved. It was suggested that the council's Project Management Toolkit could be updated to incorporate the lessons learnt from the project. This would ensure that anybody

	embarking on such an IT project in future would be able to benefit from them.
vii. Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.	Approved. MT supported the recommendation and agreed that Portfolio Holders should be regularly updated on projects being delivered in their Service.
viii. System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.	Approved. MT approved of this recommendation.

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet



Date of Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Tuesday 14th February
Cabinet: Thursday 23rd February

Report Title: Performance Report, Quarter 3 2022/23

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

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Feacey
Portfolio Holder for:

Summary:

This report summarises performance against the council's updated suite of KPIs reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24, for the Quarter 3 period 2022/23.

This report pulls from across council services the information necessary to reflect the quarterly KPIs. Representing these in the four themes of the Corporate Plan that of Green Pioneer, Caring Ashford, Targeted Growth and the councils underlying principles.

In addition to surrounding narrative for specific KPIs where available, this report highlights some of the key actions over the quarter where relevant to the aims and objectives of the Corporate plan.

Key Decision: No

Significantly Affected Wards: None

Recommendations: Overview and Scrutiny
Cabinet, is asked to:-

I. Consider the performance data for Quarter 3 2022/23

Policy Overview: Performance measures have been updated to reflect the objectives and priorities of The Corporate Plan 22-24.

	This quarterly Performance Report acts as an opportunity to monitor the progress made by the council against the Corporate Plan.
Financial Implications:	N/A
Legal Implications:	N/A
Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not required as the report presents information on past council performance and does not recommend any change to council policy or new action.
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	N/A
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	N/A
Sustainability Implications:	N/A
Other Material Implications:	N/A
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	The Corporate Plan 2022-24
Contact:	Tom.Swain@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330432

Portfolio Holder's Views:

This Q3 performance report provides an opportunity to monitor and review the council's performance against its Corporate Plan. It demonstrates some of the progress and constraints that are influencing our short and medium term performance.

Regular review of the material included in this report ensures Members and Officers remain focused on our priorities and understand the issues that are affecting our residents, providing an early indication of the areas we need to focus our attention on moving forward.

Report Title: Performance Report, Quarter 3 2022/23

Introduction and Background


1. 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 as an interim strategic document to focus our work towards enabling a timely recovery from the pandemic, supporting residents, communities and local business.
2. With the start of the 22/23 financial year the Recovery Plan has now been superseded by the [Corporate Plan 22-24](#). This Corporate Plan 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.
3. The Ashford Ambition is supported by three priority themes:
 - Green Pioneer – Where businesses, communities and 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.

These along with our underlying principles provide a framework that focuses our efforts on working towards our strategic objectives.
4. This report seeks to provide an overview of performance against the council's key performance indicators for Quarter 3 2022/23 period. The council's performance framework captures key performance data from across the organisation as it relates to the council's Corporate Plan.







Areas of Note

5. Whilst measures reflecting our statutory functions continue to show positive progress and largely meet targets. It remains clear from a number of measures that the cost of living squeeze and associated inflationary pressures are starting to present a material impact on our residents and the council's budgets.
6. With our communities still in the recovery phase following the pandemic, the cost of living squeeze is a further set back and this is reflected across many of our KPIs.
7. The council is continuing to focus on mitigating these pressures, with careful monitoring of its own internal budgets, please see the quarterly financial monitoring reports, as well as providing additional support to our residents where needed. Residents are reminded that our [Welfare Intervention](#) Officers are always available to assist.
8. The [Eat Well Spend Less](#) roadshow has also returned. The roadshows focus on providing targeted help and advice for local families who may need extra support as a result of rising food prices.
9. Our Town Centres are not immune and whilst occupancies rates are still above there pandemic lows, notable closures are starting to be experienced. This will likely filter through to our commercial investment measures with time. The council has ownership of a number of key sites within Ashford Town Centre and with the Town Centre Reset, a now Super Six project, this will continue to be an area of focus.
10. With legislative changes affecting a number of our Housing teams and increased scrutiny from Government on the sector, this period has seen the Housing team take the opportunity to refocus, ensuring our homes continue to meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely. With a focus on compliance, voids, rent collection and repairs.
11. The period has seen the awarding of a new waste contract to SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK Ltd. Ashford, Maidstone and Swale councils, who work together as the Mid Kent Waste Partnership, have awarded the eight-year contract to Suez after a joint tender process. The new service begins in March 2024 and will bring in new technology and industry improvements, whilst retaining large parts of the existing service.
12. Finally, our Planning service with the new planning system now beginning to bed in and [Stodmarsh mitigation](#) measures moving forward, improvements in the associated measures should start to be seen. The team have a second clearance week planned for February, with the first successfully clearing in excess of 150 applications, this second week should also start to see the number of live applications begin to fall (CP_KPI_56).

Performance Report for the Corporate Plan 2022-24, Quarter 3 - 2022/23

<div> 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. </div> <div>  Ashford Borough Council </div>			
Theme	Challenges	Objectives	Outcomes
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.	Tackling climate change by achieving carbon neutrality Enabling development whilst protecting the environment Ensuring no one is disadvantaged as we reduce the carbon footprint of our services and operations	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 in 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.	Enabling homes that are affordable to local people on low incomes Improving wellbeing and opportunities for people living in the most disadvantage areas Raising educational attainment and skills level of local population	CA1: Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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.	Ensuring our towns remain vibrant places and adapt to changing consumer habits Matching local skills with the needs of employers Attracting new industries to establish in borough and retain and grow existing business	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 - The borough 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

Corporate Plan Themes and Key Performance Measures

PI Status		Long Term Trends	
	Alert		Improving
	Warning		No Change
	OK		Getting Worse

Green Pioneer

Highlights from the Quarter

New waste and recycling service on its way







Three Kent councils have agreed a new waste and recycling contract with SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK Ltd, worth around £19m per year across the whole Mid Kent contract.

Ashford, Maidstone and Swale councils - who work together as the Mid Kent Waste Partnership - have awarded the eight-year contract to Suez after a joint tender process. The new service begins in March 2024 and will bring in new technology and industry improvements, whilst retaining large parts of the existing service.

Fortnightly collections of waste and recycling will continue across the three boroughs, with one wheeled bin for dry recycling, alongside the regular weekly food waste collections. The new contract offers the chance to increase recycling rates, improved efficiency of the routes, lower emissions from vehicles and add better technology to keep residents up to date.

Quarterly Measures

Page 49

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_06 Number of organisations committed to active travel plans cycling/walking	Number of organisations committed to travel plans cycling/walking	Officers are developing a proposal for a travel plan for Ashford Borough Council staff. Work continues to explore how we can work with a local business to pilot an active travel plan within the borough to inform further role out. Initiatives to get people cycling through 'guided rides' and bike repair and maintenance schemes have been successful and will continue to be offered.									
CP_KPI_09 Recycling Rate	% of borough waste recycled or composted	54.67%	50%		52.67%	50%		54%	50%		Recycle average is leading towards achieving 53% recovery for the FY at present. Q3 figures based on October figure only.
Ashford's recycling rate remains comfortably above the national target of 50% 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											
CP_KPI_10 Refuse Collection Success Rate	% of successful refuse collections per 100,000 refuse collections made.	99.96%	99.96%		99.96%	99.96%		99.97%	99.96%		Waste data from UK local authorities is reported to WasteDataFlow with statistics available at the following links: WasteDataFlow Waste and recycling statistics
New Waste Contract.pdf (moderngov.co.uk) This Cabinet report identifies the evaluation undertaken, the costs and the key changes and benefits that will occur from the proposed new waste contract.											

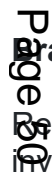
Caring Ashford

Highlights from the Quarter

Ryland Road brand new play area now open

Rylands Road play area, situated on Rylands Road, Bockhanger, Ashford, is now officially open after a revamp following a £340,000 investment.

The brand new play area allows children of all ages and abilities lots of exciting options to play and have fun including a new multiplay unit for toddlers, trampolines and play panels, a large junior multiplay unit with a slide, large climbing unit, springers, teacup dipper and bouncing spinners, a disability friendly roundabout and a range of different swings.



Brand new play area coming to Spearpoint Recreation Ground

Residents will soon see the build of a brand new play and fitness area at Spearpoint Recreation Ground, Kennington, with 65 new play features, inviting all ages to have fun

The play area will be split into zones with easy access between each, for infants, toddlers, juniors, teens, with a respite and fitness area.




The infant and toddlers areas are full of spinning, sliding and swinging features ready to explore with multiplay units, rockers, spinners, swings including you&me seats and an inclusive roundabout. A bespoke Heinkel Plane for toddlers is included and will commemorate the heritage of the site.

Jasmin Vardimon Company unveils state of the art space in Ashford

The acclaimed dance company becomes the first choreographer-named organisation to have its own purpose-built home outside London. JVC has revealed its new state-of-the-art purpose-built home.

Eight years in the planning and part funded by a £3million National Lottery grant with other financing from Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council, JVC Home also includes incubator and start-up spaces for emerging local creative companies and individuals.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_13 Food Hygiene Rating	% of businesses in the borough with a food hygiene rating above 3*	99.2%	98.5%		98.8%	98.5%		98.8%	98.5%		

Ashford Borough Council's Annual Food Service Plan 2022/23, includes a review of performance in delivering official food controls during 2021/22 is available at: [Food Services Plan 2022/23.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

CP_KPI_17 Council Affordable Housing – New Build	No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	17			0			0			No houses completed during the period due to Stodmarsh restrictions unfortunately.
---	---	----	--	--	---	--	--	---	--	--	--

However in the pipeline for delivery we have 20 homes with approval in Mabledon Avenue that we would hope to begin on site as soon as possible and that in the planning process we currently have 3 x infill schemes totalling 12 homes, an independent living scheme totalling 69 dwellings and a temporary accommodation scheme totalling 23 dwellings.

[Housing Revenue Account HRA Business Plan 2022 -2052 including Financing and Affordable Homes Pro.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

CP_KPI_18 Council Affordable Housing - On-	No. of additional on-street purchase affordable homes delivered by council housing	3			1			1			1 home completed in this period for the HRA. Two further property for the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) completed in this period too but that is from the general fund and not normally included within
---	--	---	--	--	---	--	--	---	--	--	--

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
Street Purchases											these figures.

As listed in previous quarters this way of acquiring properties is not as competitive as it was during recent years since the property market boomed over the early part of last year when the stamp duty holiday was in place. There are reports that the market is slowing down so the suitability of such an approach in the market will be re-evaluated as things progress.

CP_KPI_19 Homelessness Presentations	No. of homelessness presentations	391			466			394			
CP_KPI_19b Homelessness Preventions (still in Accommodation)	No. of households where homelessness was prevented	24			28			27			

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](#)

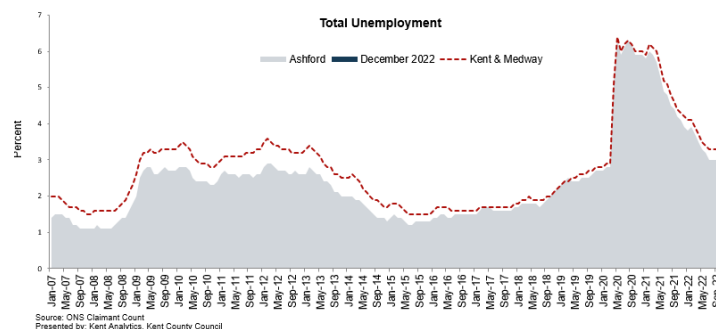
Temporary Accommodation has seen a further increase in demand and is forecasting an additional pressure of £197,000, [Novembers Quarterly Financial Monitoring: \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#) this is a total variance of £400,000 on the original budget. This trend is reflected across the County.

CP_KPI_20 Disabled Facilities Grants Completed	No. of disabled facilities grants administered by the council	16			20			20			A good figure considering the run up to Christmas.
	Actual spend per	£196,521.61			£284,750.48			£309,199.04			Average spend for this time of year.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_20b Disabled Facilities Grant Spend	month for disabled facility grants										

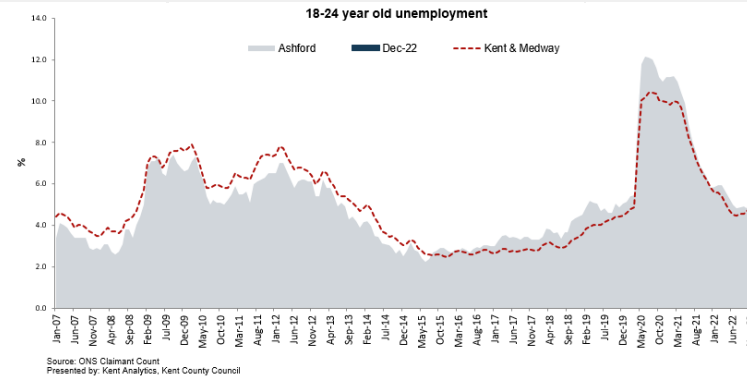
This report sets out the findings of a review into the Councils' processes for administering Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) and disabled adaptations in the Council housing stock [Disabled Adaptations Review.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

CP_KPI_21 Unemployment	Unemployment figures taken monthly from Kent County Councils Economy and employment data.	3.2%			3%			3%			<p>More information available within - Economy and employment data - Kent County Council</p> <p>The unemployment rate in Ashford is 3%. This is slightly below the rate for Kent (3.3%). 2,370 people were claiming unemployment benefits in Ashford.</p>
---------------------------	---	------	--	--	----	--	--	----	--	--	---



December 2022	Number	% rate	Number change since November 2022	% change since November 2022	Number change since December 2021	% change since December 2021
Ashford	2,370	3.0%	+40	+1.7%	-690	-22.5%
Kent & Medway	37,845	3.3%	+840	+2.3%	-9,145	-19.5%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_22 Unemployment 18-24yr olds	Unemployment 18-24yr olds taken monthly from the Kent County Council economy and employment data	4.9%			4.9%			5%			<p>More information available within - Economy and employment data - Kent County Council</p> <p>Latest available data on Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) is available from - Tracking Young People - KELS!</p>






18-24 Unemployment

December 2022	Number	% rate	Number change since November 2022	% change since November 2022	Number change since December 2021	% change since December 2021
Ashford	440	5.0%	-5	-1.1%	-65	-12.9%
Kent & Medway	6,920	4.9%	+145	+2.1%	-1,315	-16.0%

CP_KPI_26 Benefit Change of Circumstance Processing	Average time taken to process a benefit change of circumstance in no. days	1.94	10	✓	2.17	10	✓	2.14	10	✓	Benefit change of circumstance processing time continues to remain on target.
--	--	------	----	---	------	----	---	------	----	---	---

Page 55

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_27 Benefit New Claim Processing Time	Average time taken to process a new benefit payment claim in no. days	28.78	28		27.72	28		26.1	28		Processing time returned to target following Q1 delay in the processing of a number of new claims in Exempt Supported Accommodation and Temporary Accommodation due to delays in obtaining clarification regarding subsidy implications from the DWP
CP_KPI_29 Value of grants awarded via community grant fund.	Value of grants awarded via community grant fund	£334,453.70 for 2021/22			£249,101 for H1 of 22/23			£268,978.35 to date for the financial year.			Value of grants awarded via Community Grants Fund to date this financial year: £268,978.35. Only increase in grants awarded since last period is from member grants – no additional capital grant round this period and community services grants all awarded in quarter 1
CP_KPI_30 Number of tickets sold local lottery Scheme	Number of tickets sold local lottery scheme – generating x amount.	Since start of scheme 17 Feb 2022, 16,614 tickets			Since start of scheme 17 Feb 2022 24,106 tickets			Since start of scheme 35,305 tickets sold			Ashford Community Lottery: 35,305 tickets sold to 31/12/22 generating £21,183 for good causes since start of lottery in Feb 2022 (60p from every ticket sold direct to good causes now implemented)
Income direct to good causes will rise by 10p to 60p from each ticket sale from 7 Nov when change takes effect.											
Information about the Ashford Community Lottery is available from Ashford Community Lottery: Easy online fundraising for good causes - Ashford Community Lottery											
CP_KPI_32 Support to ‘vulnerable’	Support to ‘vulnerable’ groups through leisure centre activity	Ongoing projects and activities: Silent Sunday (SEN); a weekly soft play session targeted towards children up to 12yrs with special educational needs averaging 100 participants per month									

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
groups through leisure centre activity		Learning Difficulties Group, East Kent NHS Foundation; This is a 10-week course where supervised access to the gym and an exclusive Aqua Aerobics class is offered.									
		75+ free swimming was launched recently in Q2. 70+ members.									
		Fit for Life – 100+ participants a month.									
		GP Referral Re-launch; newly re-launched scheme across both Stour and Julie Rose with a dedicated staff member, more pathways to referral, better monitoring and use of more facilities such as the Stour Bio-circuit. 34 referrals since June.									
		Refugee support – 135 free memberships in 2022.									
Overall performance across the leisure centre contract has remained constant or shown increases in participation in some areas. This summer holiday period was the first one the Stour has been fully open since Freedom took over which meant that a full programme of swimming and holiday activities could be delivered for the first time. The Julie Rose running track was re-laid by ABC's contractors at the end of last quarter, with positive feedback from users.											
Pressure on operational costs from increases in utility prices remain as key challenges. A pre-booking system for the tennis courts a Spearpoint came into use (remaining free to use). Freedom continue to develop their environmental policy, with some key targets being developed for the future of the contract.											
An update on the Freedom leisure progress was provided to members prior of November's Cabinet.											

Targeted Growth

Highlights from the Quarter

Brompton submits planning application to build revolutionary bicycle factory of the future in Ashford

Ashford Borough Council has confirmed that a planning application has been received from Brompton for a revolutionary new factory, delivering a £100 million investment for the local area and potential for up to 4,000 jobs for the Kent economy.

Carnival of the Baubles kicked off the countdown to Christmas in Ashford town centre

Christmas celebrations were in full swing in Ashford in late November as Carnival of the Baubles brought a day of festive, family fun to the town centre.

Thousands of people lined the streets to watch the Outer Space themed procession of giant illuminated lanterns and baubles make its way through the heart of the town. Local school children and community groups gathered at Elwick Place and proceeded up Bank Street through to the Lower High Street where the procession came to a celebratory end with an amazing drumming performance by Blocofogo. The star of the show was BinBot, a giant mechanical puppet, who led the procession of lights alongside students from TheatreTrain Ashford and the man himself, Father Christmas, who danced his way up the street in a rocket.

Reset sets out next stage of development and regeneration of Ashford Town Centre

There has never been a more important time to set out a clear focus and strategy for Ashford Town Centre. High streets up and down the country are facing many challenges with the after-effects of the Covid pandemic joining the cost-of-living crisis, ongoing financial uncertainty, and the growing competition of online shopping. What is clear is that the space required for retail in town centres is shrinking.

Ashford Borough Council understands the challenges that our town centre residents, businesses, users and community groups face. Town

Centres are facing considerable changes over a short period of time, being influenced by wider economic, environment and social changes. It is vital that we continue to invest in carefully thought-through ideas and solutions to help bring about significant change, for the benefit of all.

The Town Centre Reset – including the revitalisation of our High Street is a ‘Super 6’ project, and a key priority in our Corporate Plan 2022-24. It identifies a number of areas that require improvement and intervention, and these areas have had to be prioritised to focus available resources over the next few years.

Works begin to preserve the life of Ashford Shared Space

During the period Kent County Council (KCC) begin roadworks aimed at preserving the life of Ashford Shared Space and Lower High Street.

Once achieved the area will be better preserved for the longer term, making it more resistant to damage in the future and improving accessibility.

Works totalling up to £600,000 began in November and is expected to be completed in five phases with everything aimed to be completed by the Spring of 2023.

The scheme is a joint project by KCC and Ashford Borough Council (ABC), originally set up to improve the look and feel of the town centre as well as enhancing safety for pedestrians.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_33 Business survival -	Business survival, measure based upon our business rates records	8.65%			9.4%			9.2%			5351 properties, 331 exemptions, 161 reliefs

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
current vacancy rates	Current Vacancy rates										

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.

CP_KPI_34	Ashford town centre vacancy rate	15.4%			15.5%			15.2%			Jan-23, 335 units, 51 empty - 15.2%
Ashford town centre vacancy rate											

The area surveyed is the High Street, Middle Row, New Rents, North Street, Bank Street, Tufton Street, County Square, Park Mall and Elwick Place. This is surveyed manually quarterly.




Vacancy rates peaked at 20% in September 2020, due to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Although improved from the low, vacancy rates remain significantly above the previous low of 8% in November 2017, and remain significantly above national benchmarks, which were 12% in January 2022

[Ashford Town Centre Reset - Strategy Action Plan.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

CP_KPI_35	Contribution to budget from commercial investments utilising the budgeted figures provided as part of the councils budget books.	92.2%			81.5%			88%			Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.
Contribution to budget from commercial investments											

The Corporate Property Annual Performance Report 2021/22 reviewing revenue performance of the Council's corporate property portfolio during the financial year, as well as advising on its expected future performance: [Corporate Property Performance Annual Report 2021/22](#)

Page 60

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note																								
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status																									
CP_KPI_36	Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	8%			6%			6.5%																											
Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)																																			
<table><tr><th>Site</th><th>Square foot let</th><th>Total square foot</th><th>Percentage let</th></tr><tr><td>Ellingham</td><td>64,397 sf</td><td>64,397 sf</td><td>100.0%</td></tr><tr><td>Carlton Road</td><td>37,244 sf</td><td>42,065 sf</td><td>88.5%</td></tr><tr><td>Elwick Place</td><td>92,026 sf</td><td>94,351 sf</td><td>97.5%</td></tr><tr><td>International House</td><td>71,101 sf</td><td>82,462 sf</td><td>86.2%</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>264,768 sf</td><td>283,275 sf</td><td>93.5%</td></tr></table>												Site	Square foot let	Total square foot	Percentage let	Ellingham	64,397 sf	64,397 sf	100.0%	Carlton Road	37,244 sf	42,065 sf	88.5%	Elwick Place	92,026 sf	94,351 sf	97.5%	International House	71,101 sf	82,462 sf	86.2%	Total	264,768 sf	283,275 sf	93.5%
Site	Square foot let	Total square foot	Percentage let																																
Ellingham	64,397 sf	64,397 sf	100.0%																																
Carlton Road	37,244 sf	42,065 sf	88.5%																																
Elwick Place	92,026 sf	94,351 sf	97.5%																																
International House	71,101 sf	82,462 sf	86.2%																																
Total	264,768 sf	283,275 sf	93.5%																																
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.																																			
CP_KPI_38	Digital uptake - % of total council /% Increase transactions completed electronically.	83	80		80.39	80		83	80		In December 2022 we saw our best ever month in terms of digital uptake with 89.63% of transactions happening digitally. The previous best was in December 2021 at 89.07%. We anticipated December to have an increase on previous months as our webpage views for bin collections tend to peak at this time of the year, coupled with the fact that the call centre isn't open for as many days.																								
Digital uptake																																			
The Customer Service, IT and Digital Strategy was adopted at the end of June 2022 with a key focus of keeping the customer at the centre of our services. Customer Service IT Digital Strategy.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)																																			

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
				Oct 22			Nov 22			Dec 22	
		Digital Transactions		27,523			27,111			36,383	
		Total Transactions		34,454			34,465			40,594	
		Digital Uptake		79.88%			78.66%			89.63%	

CP_KPI_39	Social media engagement	Q1 (April-June)	Q2 (July-Sept)	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	Ashford Borough Council's Communications team is responsible for managing the council's social media accounts. Our most active platforms that residents can engage with the council on, include Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor and Instagram. The data will allow the Council to better understand the needs of our residents and ensure that our social media strategy is shaped by the results of the data. With circa 50,000 combined total followers across all ABC social platforms, the Communications Team are also actively exploring methods to further grow each platform through various digital tools so that they can effectively reach more residents across the borough, including those in rural areas.
		Impressions Facebook: 977,240 Twitter: 62,471 Nextdoor: 91,593 Instagram: 2,747 Followers Facebook: 10,115 Twitter: 9,082 Nextdoor: 25,536 Instagram: 2,574	Impressions Facebook: 867,487 Twitter: 47,088 Nextdoor: 123,428 Instagram: 8,766 Followers Facebook: 10,459 Twitter: 9,112 Nextdoor: 26,407 Instagram: 2,633	Impressions Facebook: 798,723 Twitter: 27,170 Nextdoor: 172,687 Instagram: 11,724 Followers Facebook: 10,679 Twitter: 9,101 Nextdoor: 27,004 Instagram: 2,677	

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_41	Parking usage	243,026			259,506			277,199			
Parking usage	Ashford and Tenterden Car Parks										

Overview of Car Park and on-Street sales for December 2022. These income figures are generated from the following systems, Pay and Display Machines (Flowbird), Pay by Phone (RingGo) and SAGOSS (ANPR).

Monthly sales can fluctuate because of daily variation and the number of weekdays and Saturdays that fall within a given month, which may have a slight effect on income trends .

Please see monthly revenue as below;-

Month	Income	Notes
December	£202,995	Low Seasonal Trend. This could be attributed to free parking offer over the festive period and impact of cost of living. In comparison (pre-covid). Dec 2018 was £211,456
November	£244,106	
October	£225,664	
September	£211,014	
August	£216,092	
July	£202,580	
Average monthly total	£215,000	

Please see the monthly transactions below:

Month	Income
December	91,122
November	101,633

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
	October	105,522									
	September	95,762									
	Average monthly transactions (pre-covid)	106,774									

Our income is built up of 70% from Ashford and 30% from Tenterden.

Top Performing Car Parks this month

1. Vicarage Lane Car Park (Ashford) £44k – same as previous month

The forecast for this car park alone at end of financial year = is over £550k, which equates to around 21% of total income.

2. Recreation Ground Car Park (Tenterden) £38k – same as previous month

3. Elwick Place (Ashford) £30k – slight increase from previous month

Total Financial Year Figures/ Income

Forecast for 2022-23	£2,500,000
2021-22	£2,203,918
2020-21	£819,698
2019-20 Income	£2,591,786

Recovery

We want to ensure that people visit and stay in our communities by deploying technologies that improve access and services for all of our consumers. Our cashless parking system is accessible in all car parks for individuals who wish to pay using a mobile device. This has been a tremendous success, with strong client participation.

I have provided Finance with estimates for 2022–2023 based on the material in this monthly report. The forecast indicates that earnings will exceed expectations.

Our Principles

Highlights from the Quarter

Residents' survey reveals satisfaction levels with Council

The 2022 Residents' Survey indicates that residents' general views on the council and our performance have stayed broadly consistent. Satisfaction levels with key services remains high and efforts to improve community safety and communication with residents appear to have been effective.




The survey, which took place over the summer, asked residents for their views regarding the council and specific service areas, their local area and other topical questions.

Feedback on the council's response to the pandemic was positive and residents were generally happy with our digitalisation efforts. The continued importance of accessible in person options for older and digitally excluded residents was also made clear.

Areas for improvement include residents continuing to feel they have little influence over council decisions whilst development and car parking provision in the borough remain areas where residents were less satisfied.

[Residents Survey 2022.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_42 FOI Response Rate	% of freedom of information requests responded to within 20 working days	98%	95%		95.6%	95%		100%	95%		156 requests received, no requests responded to beyond 20 working days

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_43 Business Rates Collection	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month	30.12%	24.75%		56.38%	49.5%		82.11%	74.25%		Government finance including Ashford Borough Council, covering borrowing and investment, capital payments and receipts, local Council Tax support, quarterly revenue outturn and receipts of Council Taxes and national non-domestic rates are available here
CP_KPI_44 Council Tax Collection Rate	Percentage of council tax collected - cumulative figure per month	30.1%	24.57%		57.25%	49.14%		85.57%	73.71%		




CP_KPI_46 Gas Safety Certificates	% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	99.81%	100%		99.74%	100%		99.87%	100%		99.93% December
--------------------------------------	---	--------	------	--	--------	------	--	--------	------	--	-----------------

Our homes must meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely, although 99.93%, the measure as of December 2022 appears high, our target is 100% and there is reviewed focus to achieve this consistently with a zero tolerance approach to access issues.

CP_KPI_47 Number of days sickness per full time equivalent		For the complete year 21/22 8.04 days per FTE						10.41 days per FTE			
---	--	---	--	--	--	--	--	--------------------	--	--	--







Sickness absence per employee Q3 01 Oct 22 to 31 Dec 22

A total of 1,293.77 days were lost due to sickness absence during the quarter 01.10.22 to 31.12.22; annualised this figure would be 5,175.08. FTE at 31.12.22 was 497.29. Therefore, total days sickness per FTE (annualised for a 12-month period) equals 10.41 days. Please note that this is a winter quarter which has been annualised and absence levels are higher during this

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_53 Planning Application Approvals	% of planning applications approved	85%	90%		90%	90%		92%	90%		

The national average performance for the percentage of planning applications approved is usually around 87 to 88%. As the financial year has progressed our performance here has returned to target.







A recent update on the Stodmarsh situation was presented to Cabinet [Stodmarsh Update.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#), explaining the progress made towards a mitigation to this strategic issue.

CP_KPI_54 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)	50%	65%		69%	65%		88%	65%		
CP_KPI_54b % of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	82%	75%		79%	75%		77%	75%		

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](#)




Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

Performance remains good across the broader period in respect of major application determinations. Q1 performance was below par but it was based on just 11 cases (i.e. 5 out of 12 is 55%). The cases that ran over the statutory target date were mostly subject to particular causes of delay and difficulty associated with S106, Stodmarsh, Committee referral and two were refused without agreement to an EOT from the applicant.

Page 68	CP_KPI_55	% 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).	86%	75%		83%	75%		81%	75%		
	Speed of Non-Major Planning Application Decisions											
	CP_KPI_55b	% of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	90%	80%		89%	80%		87%	80%		
	% of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month											

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.

CP_KPI_56	Number includes all conditions applications, pre-app cases, as well as applications for	817	550		831	550		985	550		
Number of live											

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2022/23			Q2 2022/23			Q3 2022/23			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
planning casework reducing backlog	outline, full or reserved matters consent. Reducing backlog with a capacity set at 550 open cases										

Application numbers have continued to increase. Stodmarsh is a known factor which is holding applications up (approximately 220 cases at Q2) and implementation of the new planning application management system (ARCUS) has resulted in the number of live applications increasing temporarily. In relation to Stodmarsh, officers are taking cases to the point where proposals can be agreed in all other respects 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. In relation to the build-up of cases as a result of the introduction of ARCUS, officers are holding a second clearance week in February, following the very successful clearance week in May. This is designed to shift a lot of cases by freeing planning officers for one week to focus purely on making planning decisions. In May this resulted in 170 applications being determined in one week.

Staffing resources remain fairly stable in the Development Management Team with most posts now filled on a permanent basis and reducing consultancy support. This trend is expected to continue but will be managed against on-going caseload numbers.

This page is intentionally left blank

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Tracker – February 2023

Current Work Programme			
Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
Community Safety Partnership	March 2023	Safety and Wellbeing	A review of the decisions made and action taken in connection with the discharge of crime and disorder functions by the members of the Community Safety Partnership. The Committee operates as the designated Crime and Disorder Committee for the council.
Safeguarding Update	March 2023	Safety and Wellbeing	Annual update to the committee on the council's work on safeguarding adults and children at risk.
Freedom Leisure Contract	Date TBC	Environment, Property and Recreation	<p>A report to review the council's new leisure operator. Scrutiny of this topic would examine how the service has been running, the savings made to the council and the levels of customer satisfaction with the service.</p> <p>Note: An internal audit of the contract is underway and a report could come to O&S after the audit process has been completed.</p>

This page is intentionally left blank