



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL on Tuesday, 12th September, 2023 at 7.00 pm.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Bell (Chair)
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs. Arnold, Bartlett, Buchanan, Feacey, Joseph, Ledger, Meaden, Michael, Shilton and Suddards

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| 2. | Declarations of Interest | 3 - 4 |
| | 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 | 5 - 12 |
| | To approve the Minutes of the last Meeting | |
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DS
4 September 2023

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Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

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

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

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **11th July 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair),
Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chair).

Cllrs. Bartlett, Mrs. C. Bell, Feacey, Joseph, Ledger, Meaden, Michael, Shilton, C. Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr Mrs C. Bell attended as Substitute Member for the Conservative Vacancy.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Arnold, Buchanan, Giles, Nilsson.

In attendance:

Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation,
Human Resources Manager, Project Accountant, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Service Lead Finance

64 Election of Chair

Resolved:

That Cllr. Bell be elected as Chair for this Meeting

65 Election of Vice Chair

Resolved:

That Cllr. Chilton be elected as Vice-Chair for this Meeting

66 Declarations of Interest

Cllr	Interest	Minute No
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of Ashford Volunteer Centre and Chair of Ashford International Development Company	69

67 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 13th June 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record, with the addition that Cllr. Meaden had given his apologies.

68 Annual Sickness Report 2022/23

The Human Resources Manager introduced the report, and the Committee were asked to advise Officers whether they wished to receive a further update in a years' time and if any further information on the report was required. She gave a summary of the key topics within the report, including

- 4716 total days lost to sickness
- Employees taking no sick days had decreased, owing to return to the office
- 53% short term absence and 47% long term
- Sickness absence levels had increased, returning to pre-Covid norms
- The main reason for absence was stress/mental health (33.33%), and respiratory was the 2nd highest (28.73%)
- Presenting triggers for mental ill health included work related, personal, and complex
- The cost of living crisis was anticipated to contribute to mental ill health going forward
- Established interventions and wellbeing initiatives continued to be well used
- The distribution of absence within each service was broadly in line with headcount

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

- Tonbridge & Malling Council displayed lower overall numbers and it was confirmed that this was due to a smaller workforce.
- A Member suggested that short-term sickness seemed higher for ABC, although comparable with Medway and Tonbridge & Malling. There were no exceptional reasons for ABC having slightly higher short-term absence than a neighbouring LA. The Human Resources Manager had asked KCC for their sickness data to include as a comparison, but was informed that this would not be available until September.
- The Vice-Chair spoke about work related mental health illness, specifically around restructure and possible redundancies in the coming months. He asked whether there were any initiatives or policies from the current administration to try and tackle this. The Human Resources Manager explained that currently the policy was to maintain concise communication and individuals were kept informed about procedures and given clear timeframes. HR support attended every meeting and the Employee

Assistance Programme (EAP) was available throughout the process for employees to utilise. A Management Development Programme was being introduced to provide Managers with adequate training on how to handle restructure and redundancies.

- The impact of Working from Home (WFH) was discussed with the HR Manager explaining that attitudes had shifted since Covid, with staff returning to the office in greater numbers, and many individuals utilising the WFH option and its increased flexibility to better manage their work home life balance. New candidates applying for jobs were requesting hybrid working, and LA counterparts were increasingly offering the option to maximise recruitment selection. Generation Z held an expectation to work flexibly and these workers under the age of 24 were starting to enter the workforce in greater numbers.
- Return to Work Interviews were an established tool for managers to use and proved beneficial to discover any other underlying issues or trends. It also provided the opportunity to discuss any Occupational Health referral needed.
- The EAP was an extremely valuable service offering a counselling provision, with managers able to refer individuals. Referrals were expected to increase in the current climate with more staff welfare concerns over the Cost of Living Crisis. The HR Manager outlined how the service operated to the Committee.
- It was confirmed that the Benenden Health scheme, currently open to staff members, was not open to Councillors.
- A query was raised around the accuracy of the figures showing days lost to sickness during Covid being lower than now. It was explained that during the lockdown periods, people were less exposed to the usual viruses and bugs they would pick up when working in an office, in shops or leisure venues, hence the lower sickness figure during that period. Diagnosis levels also decreased.
- One Member highlighted the importance of nurturing staff, since they were the Council's primary asset. With increased pressure on a smaller workforce, his concern was that this could detrimentally affect staff mental health and wellbeing even more in the future. The Staff Survey was anticipated to be conducted in autumn 2023, and the Questionnaire was based on the HSE standards around stress, designed for organisations to obtain a good grasp on the pressures and demands on employees.
- The Member then spoke about home working, and he described the problems encountered in Schools with children not receiving discipline during lockdown, and his concern that WFH was not productive. He said that he had witnessed neighbouring residents supposedly WFH, but seemingly not undertaking any work. He worried that the right expectation levels were being set.
- A comparator to other LA's was requested for mental ill health related absence (point 23 in the report), in future, as this would be beneficial for the Committee. The HR Manager confirmed that she would endeavour to include

that comparator, and noted that mental ill health had steadily increased over recent years nationally.

- The Committee agreed that it would be valuable for Portfolio Holders to attend the meetings. Once a Chair had been officially appointed following full Council on 20th July, invitations would be sent to Portfolio Holders for individual meetings.
- The variance nationally between private and public sector absence rates was discussed, and the Chair suggested ABC should be aiming to be comparable to the private sector rates. The Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation reminded the Committee that sickness pay within the public sector was often more generous than in the private sector, so employees on lower income were not under that financial pressure to come to work when feeling unwell. The Chair highlighted the point made earlier regarding the link between short-term sickness and staff morale, and the HR Manager said that long-term sickness could also peak and a more in depth study such as the staff survey would be needed to ascertain trends. Mental health often went hand in hand with self-care and resilience. The stress container was another tool managers could use to ascertain how much pressure each individual was under, and set appropriate goals going forward. The Chair asked whether the Survey could be brought forward, but the Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation confirmed that this was not possible due to other larger HR projects the Council had committed to. However, the questions contained within the survey would be presented to the Committee prior to publication.

Recommended:

- That**
- i) the report be received and noted**
 - ii) the report be brought before the Committee next year**
 - iii) any requests in connection to the report data made during the meeting be carried out by Officers**

69 Savings Plan Progress Update

The Project Accountant introduced this report and she outlined the budget build process to close the deficit gap of £1.6m. Savings of £200k had already been applied, and proposals for a further £1.4m had been identified.

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

- The Chairman asked whether the figures quoted at the last Cabinet meeting were confirmed. The Service Lead Finance explained the figures at that time were projected and that following that meeting, interest rate rises had occurred again and further rises were expected. This meant that more detailed effort was now underway to review the MTFP, since further interest rate rises and homelessness increases would present further pressures to the

Council. It was anticipated that the savings figure was more likely to be around £3m, but this was not definite. It was a continually shifting picture.

- The saving was not cumulative; once made, it would continue throughout further years.
- The MTFP was scheduled to come to the 26th October Cabinet Meeting. The Chair requested that those figures come to O&S prior to the Cabinet meeting. The October O&S Meeting was scheduled for the 10th October. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer and Service Lead Finance would liaise to determine timeframes.
- A Member highlighted analysis was needed to determine where posts may be made vacant and to determine if they were front facing or back office. The Joint Consultative Committee would be involved in all processes and more details would be available concerning posts once more work had been undertaken. A cross party working group had been suggested and this would prove very beneficial.
- The proposed saving of £100k in relation to reductions in grants was confirmed as grants received for the whole Council, not just Member grants.
- It was clarified that monies within the budget were still assigned to vacant posts until they were definitely removed, at which point that would become a definite savings amount.
- The Vice-Chair was pleased to see the removal of Deputy Portfolio Holders as he felt they were un-necessary.
- The Project Accountant confirmed that the Enforcement Review cited in the Savings Report referred to all types of enforcement within the Council, not just Planning Enforcement. She explained that there might be cross boundaries in that field and therefore room for savings to be made. The Chair voiced concern over making cuts within Planning Enforcement, since it was such a core role with specific legal attachments. The Chairman requested that the final report on this be seen by the O&S Committee also.
- The proposed move to International House was discussed and the Chair asked whether there was an assumption that WFH would continue in the same way that it currently did. The Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation explained to the Committee that WFH was here to stay across the country, and it was the way in which employees expected to work now. The modelling data for the move was based on current data received on capacity needed, and this would be the variable used to measure the amount of desks in the new building. The Chairman said that some Councillors held a certain degree of scepticism about WFH productivity levels, and so the Committee would welcome more details to show this was the best way and would provide a valuable saving. A Member asked whether the numbers of staff coming into the office had peaked, and would more space be available if more staff wanted to come into the building. The Project Accountant confirmed that International House had ample capacity, based on

the modelling and desks were available. The Chairman repeated the request for more details on the modelling data. The Service Lead Finance reminded Members that any concerns of that nature could be shared with Management Team, for them to pro-actively investigate, and help the Committee reach any decisions, including trends in days worked. The Chairman asked for his comments to be shared with Management Team, and invited any feedback received. This matter would also be covered within the topic on the work programme concerning morale, motivation and productivity (Corporate Health Check).

- It was confirmed there was no direct cost to ABC for people WFH.
- A Member spoke about deterioration in services and the need to have sight of Service Level Agreements. The Corporate Performance Review included the Key Performance Indicators and the Chair explained that was the vehicle used to present that information. Quarterly updates were also provided to the O&S Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted and the further information requested be brought to the Committee.

70 O&S Work Programme Update

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer presented the report to the Committee, which incorporated the scores and recommendations of new topic suggestions, after being put through the Matrix. New projects included a review on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, whilst the Leaders Vision for the Corporate Plan 2024 to 2028 would be deferred as the Corporate Plan was still in its early stages, and a working group was being set up. The topic of GP appointments would be assessed following the KCC Health O&S meeting on 19th July and Members were encouraged to attend this meeting, which was available to them virtually, as well as in person.

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer had been liaising with services to ascertain when reports could be produced to come to the Committee, following approval. The Cabinet Schedule of Key Decisions was newly included with the Work Programme but the expectation was not that every item on that schedule be brought to the O&S Committee.

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

- The Chair and Vice Chair had discussed the Work Programme prior to the meeting and they felt that a Task Group for the Corporate Health Check was necessary. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion would require a report prior to the formation of a Task Group. It was hoped that the Leader would attend an O&S meeting to explain his reasons for standing for election and (along with the Chief Executive) the Council's emerging corporate priorities.

- A Member spoke about inviting external partners and agencies to meet and discuss infrastructure plans. The Chair highlighted water supply as a pressing issue within the Borough and requested that this topic be scrutinised. The Policy and Scrutiny Officer said that she would need to check capacity to fit all of this work in, taking into account budget scrutiny through December and January and Officers workloads. A representative from South East Water and the Regulator would be invited to attend a future meeting.
- A Member highlighted the need for Green issues to be considered and agreed that the topic of water supply and quality be included, and asked that the topic of biodiversity be incorporated also. The Chairman said that the Waste Contract implementation was on the Tracker and remarked that he thought the Green Party would have indicated that they wanted a higher recycling target than was stated at the recent Cabinet meeting.
- The Chairman spoke about the two recommendations made at the last meeting around extending the term of office of the Mayor and the Leader. He requested that the Solicitor to the Council provide a formal letter or guidance if the recommendations were contrary to primary legislation. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the two recommendations would be going to Council for consideration.

Resolved:

That the Report Tracker be received and noted, the additional topics suggested be added and further information requested be provided.

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Agenda Item No: 5

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 12th September 2023
Thursday 28th September 2023

Report Title: Performance Report, Quarter 1 2023/24

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

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Heather Hayward
Portfolio Holder for: Performance and Direction

Summary: This report summarises performance against the council's suite of KPIs reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24, for the Quarter 1 period 2023/24.

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**
The Cabinet is recommended to:-

I. Consider the performance data for Quarter 1 2023/24

Policy Overview: Performance measures 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:	None
Legal Implications:	None
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:	Not required
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	Not required
Sustainability Implications:	None
Other Material Implications:	None
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024
Contact:	tom.swain@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330432

Portfolio Holder’s Views:

This Q1 performance report provides an opportunity to continue the monitoring and review of the council’s performance against its Corporate Plan. It highlights the progress made 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 may need to focus our attention on moving forward.


Report Title: Performance Report, Quarter 1 2023/24

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 was 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 1 2023/24 period. The council's performance framework captures key performance data from across the organisation as it relates to the council's Corporate Plan.

Performance Report for the Corporate Plan 2022-24, Quarter 1 - 2023/24

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

Ashford's Great Big Green Week 2023

This year's national 'The Great Big Green Week' activities organised by Ashford Borough Council were well met by local residents.

The Great Big Green Week is a national celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature. Ashford Borough Council organised various activities throughout the week to ignite conversations and encourage residents to get involved. The main event, Great Big Green Week Roadshow, took place in Ashford Town Centre.

Handlebars Vs Cars

A commuter revolution, where we set presenter [Liu Batchelor](#) the challenge of racing a car on her bike during rush hour traffic from Singleton to Coachworks. The aim to inspire more people to give active travel, cycling and giving commuting by bike a try. The project still continues to pick up media interest, interviews and positive feedback. During the two-week campaign Liu's own social media avenues attracted 16,283 facebook engagements, 8,773 linkedIn Impressions, 9,201 Instagram Views and 3,060 Tick Tock Views.

Green Heat Network

Heat Networks are a feature of the national low carbon energy strategy – delivering heat from centralised generation or waste sources directly to our homes and business rather than fuel like gas or oil. Following our successful bid for £97k to undertake feasibility work to explore options in Ashford, work with the Dept for Energy Security and Net Zero has been ongoing to finalise the specifications for the Newtown Heat Network feasibility study and an Ashford Town wide Heat Network Zoning Study which will identify areas suitable for exploring our first Borough Heat Networks. Tenders will be awarded for the studies early in Quarter 2.

Electricals Recycling – Materials Focus

£10k external funding has been secured to run six amnesty style electrical recycling projects. Aim is to highlight the potential to recycle electricals and remove them from the waste stream and also increase accessibility for those in Parishes unable to get to the recycling centres easily. Projects will work alongside pop up repair café's and mens' sheds projects to additionally offer a preferable alternative to recycling through re-use. We have secured an independent recycling partner to collect disposed items to ensure all projects are wholly self-funded. Our bid also allows for PAT testing training to be offered to community groups to support increase reuse options and safety. The project has been set up with longevity in mind and dependent on success further rollouts are possible using the pre-funded 'kit' and new partners. Project roll out starts in September.

Integrating Climate Considerations into the Day to Day

Climate Impact Assessments are now embedded into the project management toolkit and part of the Project Management Approval process. A simple questionnaire generates a visual Red Amber Green - RAG rating to help project officers consider climate impacts and where necessary redesign projects to ensure they are as sustainable as possible. It covers fossil fuel use as well as exploring the circular economy, material choices and recyclability; impact on biodiversity; and adaptation to climate change. The visual aid will help decision makers consider climate impacts and while this is a qualitative assessment it is the start of our journey to better evaluate and quantify carbon costs in our business choices. Our Ashford template (adapted from one set up by Cheltenham Council), has been presented to Kent Climate officers (as well as at an APSE webinar) and has been picked up as good practice and integrated into the procedures of several other Kent authorities.

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund

Our Principle Contractor (E.ON) is now in place and is mobilising fast. Retrofit Assessments are imminent on all 727 properties selected and the results will determine the phasing of the scheme. We are looking at a fabric first approach to all properties – External Wall Insulation, Cavity Wall Insulation, Loft Insulation, window replacement etc, as well as trialling some Ground Source Heat Pumps if feasibility is successful. Tenants have now all been actively engaged in the process and workshops have taken place in July with more planned for September. We are working with E.ON on a social value strategy too which will look at imparting some educational value on residents about the green employment sector/climate change mitigation.

Solar




Carlton Road, PV Panels have been installed on all industrial units bar the three that are not council-owned. A period of testing and commissioning will now take place before the panels are 'live', we are already using some monitoring software that shows the carbon savings. We are looking at options to possibly export the excess energy, the feasibility of which needs to be determined by UK Power Networks.

Stour Centre Solar Array, Detailed designs are being finalised for this project. Planning and Procurement are actively engaged and a project programme is being drawn up.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			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	<p>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.</p> <p>Initiatives to get people cycling through 'guided rides' and bike repair and maintenance schemes have been successful and will continue to be offered.</p>									




KCC – Feasibility study for Route 4 of the Local Cycling Plan Work has been initiated to engage Sustrans to deliver a feasibility study for a designated cycle route from Repton Park to Gasworks Lane. This is part of ongoing work to deliver the Borough's Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan. This study will put us in a strong position to bid for Capital funding to develop the route next year.

CP_KPI_09 Recycling Rate	% of borough waste recycled or composted	47.53%	50%		46.3%	50%		52.5%	50%		Defra's nationwide recycling league tables - Local authority collected waste: annual results tables (Historical) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
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Our recycling rate is cyclical with a fall seen over the Christmas, new year period. Garden waste collected during the winter months also falls with tonnages being low up until the warmer/drier days return in the spring.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

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	% of successful refuse collections per 100,000 refuse collections made.	99.97%	99.96%		99.85%	99.96%		99.73%	99.96%		
Refuse Collection Success Rate											

[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.

Waste data from UK local authorities is reported to WasteDataFlow with statistics available at the following links: [WasteDataFlow Waste and recycling statistics](#)

During the progress of the last of the performance reports through the committee stages, A Member queried whether the Council anticipated an increase in the number of Fly Tips registered, owing to the departure of an Enforcement Officer. We can report, that at this stage whilst it is too early to determine, we can confirm that we have continued to manage the investigation of the larger fly tipping reports. Additional support on the investigatory work has also been provided by the councils fraud team. Impacts on the loss of resource are expected where prosecutions are pending taking the limited front line resource away from their proactive works.

Caring Ashford

Highlights from the Quarter

Social housing repairs service set to be brought in house providing tenants with an improved service

Taking the repairs service for our 5,000-plus housing stock in house has the potential to save money and provide tenants with an improved and more efficient service, Cabinet heard during a meeting in [July](#).

The provision of a day-to-day responsive repairs service is currently outsourced by the council to a main contractor Equans. It has given notice to terminate the contract and this will end on 30 November 2023.

Officers have consulted the Housing Quality Network (HQN) to assist in reviewing the options available and HQN has identified that by bringing the service in house, a saving is possible, as well as achieving a significant increase in satisfaction levels based on sector-wide experience.

Celebrating the newly revamped Victoria Park

The Mayor of Ashford, Cllr Larry Krause unveiled a plaque to launch the revamped park and local councillors and invited guests took a tour of the new facilities.

The Victoria Park and Watercress Fields Project is a £5m+ project delivered by Ashford Borough Council and the National Lottery Heritage Fund to improve and protect Victoria Park for the local community.

Amongst other things, visitors to the park can now enjoy:

- A community building with new café and public toilets (open from 8am until 6pm daily)
- A new playground with climbing frame, swing, trampolines, a zip-wire and more
- A new hard-surface track for BMXers, skaters, and all other mini-wheels users – designed and built by the team behind the London 2012 Olympic BMX track.
- A colourful and fragrant sensory garden in the heart of a woodland meadow

- An entirely new seasonal wetland area in the heart of the park
- A better space for people at the fountain with new access and seating, improved surfacing and lighting, and new formal planting

Landscaping works will continue in the park into the autumn period, with further works around the river corridor, fencing to the infant playground and reinstatement works across the park. In addition the new nursery adjacent to the café and playground will also be operational from the end of the autumn.

New drive to provide affordable rented homes in rural areas; RACE launched by Kent Housing Group

For people struggling to find affordable rented housing in their local rural community or older residents needing to move from their current home there is hope that help could be on the way.

The Rural and Community Housing Enabling service (RACE) is an independent service for Kent and Medway, providing expertise and working directly with communities to deliver housing that matches what local people need.

RACE works with parish councils, housing teams at district and borough councils, housing associations and local developers to identify rural communities where action needs to be taken to meet the housing needs of local people.

Eat Well Spend Less came to Farrow Court

The Eat Well Spend Less roadshow came to Farrow Court in July offering support and suggestions to counter the impacts of rising food prices.




The event brought together a range of partner organisations including frontline NHS staff, council officers, outreach organisations and charities, in one easy-to-access place.

The free to attend event was open to all, not just residents of Farrow court.

Tenterden leisure Centre swimming pool reopened

Freedom Leisure and Ashford Borough Council announce that the wait for the swimming pool at Tenterden Leisure Centre to open was over. Tenterden Leisure centre managed under contract by Freedom leisure on behalf of Ashford Borough Council, reopened the swimming pool in June.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			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	98.8%	98.5%		98.5%	98.5%		98.2%	98.3%		

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 202223.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2022/03/24/food-services-plan-2022-23/)

CP_KPI_17 Council Affordable Housing - New Build	No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	0			4			0			Stodmarsh issues continue to hinder homes delivered in this period.
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[Housing Revenue Account HRA Business Plan 2022 -2052 including Financing and Affordable Homes Pro.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2022/03/24/housing-revenue-account-hra-business-plan-2022-2025-including-financing-and-affordable-homes-pro/)

CP_KPI_18 Council Affordable	No. of additional on-street purchase affordable	1			2			2			2 properties completed in this period. There was one completion for, the local authority
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
Housing - On-Street Purchases	homes delivered by council housing										housing fund (LAHF), 3 are also pending for LAHF (going through the conveyancing process), 2 street purchases for the HRA are also pending and 1 property completed for the rough sleeper accommodation project
<p>As listed in previous quarters this way of acquiring properties is not as competitive as it was during recent years since the property market spiked 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.</p>											
CP_KPI_19 Homelessness Presentations	Number of new triage cases received in the Quarter	394			631			733			35 homelessness applications throughout June. 8 at prevention stage 27 at relief stage

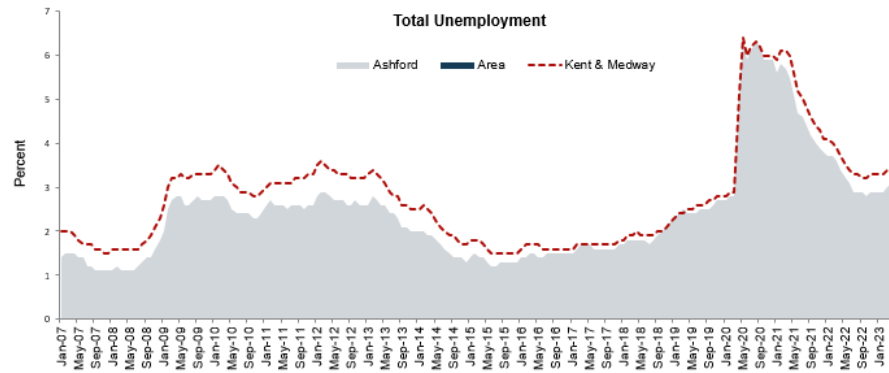
Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_19b Homelessness Preventions (still in accomodation)	No. of households where homelessness was prevented	27			30			33			

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](#)

CP_KPI_20 Disabled Facilities Grants Completed	No. of disabled facilities grants administered by the council	20			32			25			The high number for June (15) is due to the backlog of works carried over from previous quarter.
CP_KPI_20b Disabled Facilities Grant Spend	Actual spend per month for disabled facility grants	£309,199.04			£235,990.22			£328,260.04			Excellent spend month with a high number of completions

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 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

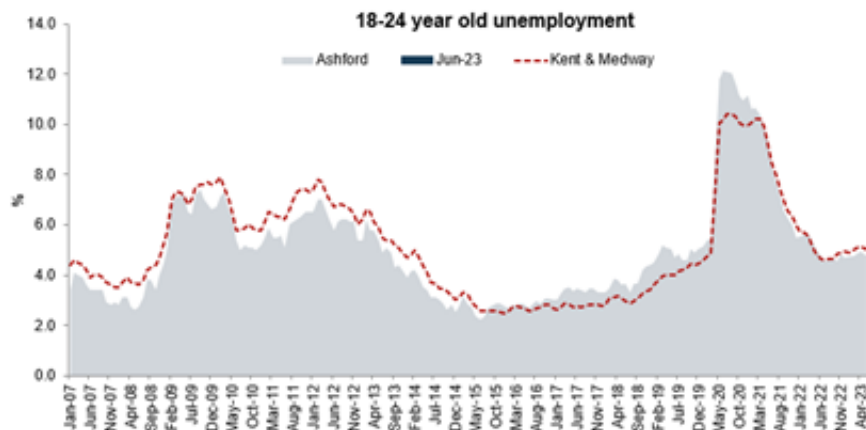
Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_21 Unemployment	Unemployment figures taken monthly from Kent County Councils Economy and employment data.	3%			3%			3%			June - 2450 unemployment count representing 3.0% More information available within - Economy and employment data - Kent County Council



June 2023

Area	Number	Rate	Number change since last month	Percentage change since last month	Number change since last year	Percentage change since last year
Ashford	2,450	3.0%	+45	+1.9%	-55	-2.2%
Kent & Medway	38,325	3.4%	+440	+1.2%	+150	+0.4%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			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	4.7%			4.8%			4.8%			June – 440 equating to 4.8% More information available within - Economy and employment data - Kent County Council



18-24 unemployment

Area	Number	Rate	Number change since last month	Percentage change since last month	Number change since last year	Percentage change since last year
Ashford	440	4.8%	+0	+0.0%	+5	+1.1%
Kent & Medway	7,010	5.1%	+55	+0.8%	+595	+9.3%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_26 Benefit Change of Circumstance Processing	Average time taken to process a benefit change of circumstance in no. days	2.14	10		1.85	10		2.1	10		Benefit change of circumstance and new claim processing times continue to remain on target.
CP_KPI_27 Benefit New Claim Processing Time	Average time taken to process a new benefit payment claim in no. days	26.1	28		24.64	28		24.94	28		Benefit change of circumstance and new claim processing times continue to remain on target.
CP_KPI_30 Number of tickets sold local lottery Scheme	Number of tickets sold local lottery scheme – generating x amount.	Since start of scheme 35,305 tickets sold			Since start of scheme 46,134 tickets sold			Since start of scheme 56,306 tickets sold			Up to 30 June 2023, 56,306 tickets have been sold and £33,783.60 raised for good causes.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_32 Support to 'vulnerable' groups through leisure centre activity	Support to 'vulnerable' groups through leisure centre activity	<p><u>New in this quarter:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pickle Ball: A new bookable activity along side badminton and offered in the sports hall, as well as added into programmes such as evergreen badminton and community based activities • Cardiac Arrest Clinic: Added in an extra hour to this each week on a Wednesday • Home Education Clip and Climb: Sessions added in for home educated children for clip and climb that compliment swim sessions already in place • Gym Induction: New simplified gym induction put into place, that is easily bookable and offers everyone an induction and programme utilising the Technogym app, and Biocircuit induction for those who are eligible. <p><u>Ongoing projects and activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holiday programme: Make this more sport focused, with camps that specialise in particular areas such as trampolining. • Walking Football: Increased the session time on this due to popularity, also added in a specific Parkinson football group who are on the schedule weekly. • NEET Programme: Continues to work within the centre, taking young people who are not in work, education or training to learn interview skills and discipline with skills such as boxing sessions. • Kent Refuge Football: Regular slot on Sunday working with Kent Refuge UK to provide sport for refugee children 									

Targeted Growth

Highlights from the Quarter

Supporting town centre businesses through tough times

A new town centre business grants scheme is being introduced to provide businesses the opportunity to apply for funding support to bring empty premises back into use and enable improvements to their current properties.

Following on from the success of the Ashford Town Centre Support Grant (ATCSG) in 2021/22, [Cabinet](#) in July, agreed the use of £140,000 of section 106 funding (from the Designer Outlet expansion) to deliver this grants scheme.

Proposed benefits include increased footfall, decreased vacancy rates and improved business resilience for successful applicants.

Parking charges to rise for the first time since 2020

Parking charges across Ashford and Tenterden are set to increase by less than the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the first increase for over three years.

Over the last few years, car parking costs have risen. Electricity bills for our parking sites have gone up by £173,000, and a significant funding gap currently exists. It is important that our car parks are maintained to ensure they are safe and we generate funds to invest, enabling the council to improve our services for the future. Members reluctantly agreed to a [proposal](#) of a minimal increase in charges. All tariffs will rise by approximately 10% (rounded to the nearest 10p), half of the CPI, which has increased by 20.18% in real terms since the last increase in charges.

Ashford's street art festival UNFRAMED

UNFRAMED, Ashford's first mural festival officially launched in the period. The contemporary street art trail, curated by Accent London and The London Mural Company, transformed blank walls and building surfaces into high quality mural paintings and bespoke integrated artwork.

Work began on the murals in Ashford, Kent, at the beginning of March 2023, when world renowned Mr Doodle, who lives in the Ashford borough, created what is believed to be the world's biggest doodle on the side of a multi storey car park.

Other artists including Alex Chinneck, Charley Peters, Curtis Hylton and local artist Danielle Williamson all took on the challenge of converting blank walls into spaces of colour and creativity.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_33 Business survival - current vacancy rates	Business survival, measure based upon our business rates records Current Vacancy rates	8.7%			9.2%			9.2%			5437 properties - 306 exemptions and 197 empty reliefs

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	Ashford town centre vacancy rate	15.2%			14.3%			15.2%			Jul-23 - 335 units surveyed 51 empty (15.2%)
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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.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

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 \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Ashford Town Centre Business Grants [\(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

CP_KPI_35	Contribution to budget from commercial investments utilising the budgeted figures provided as part of the councils budget books. Measure to start from Sept 20	88%			93%			85%			Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.
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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](#)

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_36 Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	6.5%			9.7%			10.5%			

Site	Square foot let	Total square foot	Percentage let
Ellingham	63,397 sf	64,397 sf	98.4%
Carlton Road	37,244 sf	42,065 sf	88.5%
Elwick Place	90,807 sf	104,391 sf	87.0%
International House	71,101 sf	82,462 sf	86.2%
Total	262,549 sf	293,315 sf	89.5%

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note																				
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status																					
CP_KPI_38	Digital uptake - % of total council /% Increase transactions completed electronically.	83	80		83	80		90.95	80		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Month</th> <th>Digital Transactions</th> <th>Calls</th> <th>Total Transactions</th> <th>Digital Uptake</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>April 2023</td> <td>47880</td> <td>6529</td> <td>54409</td> <td>88.00%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May 2023</td> <td>58808</td> <td>7827</td> <td>66635</td> <td>88.25%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June 2023</td> <td>81357</td> <td>8091</td> <td>89448</td> <td>90.95%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Month	Digital Transactions	Calls	Total Transactions	Digital Uptake	April 2023	47880	6529	54409	88.00%	May 2023	58808	7827	66635	88.25%	June 2023	81357	8091	89448	90.95%
Month	Digital Transactions	Calls	Total Transactions	Digital Uptake																											
April 2023	47880	6529	54409	88.00%																											
May 2023	58808	7827	66635	88.25%																											
June 2023	81357	8091	89448	90.95%																											

In June we had the best ever month in terms of digital uptake surpassing 90% of transactions via digital channels. One reason for this increase is the fact that we are now using the new Google Analytics product so we are using page view stats for certain services but June also saw a high increase in online payments, which can be attributed to garden waste subscription payments.

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 \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 (Oct-Dec)	Q4 (Jan-March)	Q1 (Apr-June)	Latest Note
		Impressions	Impressions:	Impressions:	
CP_KPI_39	Social media engagement	<p>Facebook: 798,723 Twitter: 27,170 Nextdoor: 172,687 Instagram: 11,724</p> <p>Followers</p> <p>Facebook: 10,679</p>	<p>Facebook: 522,101 Twitter: 21,731 Nextdoor: 110,663 Instagram: 5,105</p> <p>Followers:</p> <p>Facebook: 11,002</p>	<p>Facebook: 572,290 Twitter: 57,012 Nextdoor: 102,792 Instagram: 8,588</p> <p>Followers:</p> <p>Facebook: 11,312</p>	

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
		Twitter: 9,101 Nextdoor: 27,004 Instagram: 2,677			Twitter: 9,109 Nextdoor: 27,996 Instagram: 2,718			Twitter: 9,103 Nextdoor: 28,400 Instagram: 2,755			

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.

CP_KPI_41	Parking usage Ashford and Tenterden Car Parks	277,199			289,988			295,041			
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Overview of Car Park and on-Street sales for Q1. These income figures are generated from the following systems, Pay and Display Machines (Flowbird), Pay by Phone (RingGo) and SAGOSS (ANPR).

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

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
June	£240,629
May	£235,976
April	£234,877
March	£235,293
February	£227,163
January	£204,063
Average monthly total	£229,666

Month	Transactions
June	88,356
May	87,280
April	87,055
March	104,758
February	97,806
January	87,424
Average monthly total	92,113

70% of our income comes from Ashford and 30% from Tenterden.

Busiest car parks over the last three months:

1. Vicarage Lane Car Park (Ashford)
2. Elwick Place car Park (Ashford)
3. Civic Centre & Stour Centre Car Park (Ashford)

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

Total Income										
2022-23		£2,602,042								
2021-22		£2,203,918								
2020-21		£819,698								
2019-20		£2,591,786								

Figures show as increasing each month compared with the same periods last year. Income appears to be levelling out to pre-covid levels.

Our Principles

Highlights from the Quarter

Citizens Panel

A Citizens' Panel, to encourage residents to give their views and opinions on services and issues that affect the borough, has been launched.

Aiming to bring together cross section of local people to engage with the council regarding issues and proposals across the borough.

Citizens who sign up will be able to share opinions and take part in consultations through online surveys and polls to provide their views on various topics of interest to residents.

Ashford joins in national call for Government intervention to find nutrient solution

Ashford Borough Council Leader, Cllr Noel Ovenden has joined a growing number of local authority leaders across the country in signing a letter asking Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, to act now on nutrient neutrality.

Without it, they say, it will continue to stifle housing development and local economies. The letter from the District Councils' Network, outlined the concerns from local government leaders, and demanded the Government intervene.

Council outlines progress being made on Stodmarsh mitigation measures










Ashford Borough Council continues to respond to the various issues that have arisen from the need for new housing and other developments to achieve 'nutrient neutrality', due to the deterioration of Stodmarsh Lakes.




Since July 2020, certain planning applications (those providing overnight accommodation, including new housing) located within the Stour catchment and/or which discharge foul water into the catchment, have been put 'on hold' until they can achieve nutrient neutrality.

In response to this issue, the council has been working on a way to deliver long term nutrient mitigation, by identifying suitable land in the borough for strategic wetlands, which can generate off-site nutrient mitigation that can then be secured by developments, allowing them to be granted planning permission.

For further information please see, [March's Cabinet meeting](#).

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			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	100%	95%		98%	95%		99%	95%		186 requests received -1 request completed outside the 20 day window.
CP_KPI_43 Business Rates Collection	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month	82.11%	74.25%		98.6%	99%		29.1%	24.75%		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	85.57%	73.71%		97.5%	98.25%		30.03%	24.57%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_45 Percentage of invoices paid on time	Percentage of invoices paid on time	Invoices paid within 30 days of the date of the invoice - 96.56 % 1st April 2022 – 17th March 2023									
CP_KPI_46 Gas Safety Certificates	% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	99.87%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%		
Our homes must meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely, 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		10.41 days per FTE					9.68 days per FTE				







Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	




A total of 4,716 days were lost due to sickness absence across the 12-month period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. Based on the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employees at 31 March 2023, 487.12 FTE, the total amount of working days lost due to sickness in 2022/23 is 9.68 days per FTE.

[Annual Sickness Report 202223.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

CP_KPI_48	Average wait time for customer service calls - to be benchmarked with results across Kent	0h 00m 49s	0h 01m 38s	✔	0h 00m 48s	0h 01m 38s	✔	0h 01m 12s	0h 01m 38s	✔	
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CP_KPI_51	number of ongoing litigation/court proceedings (volume measure)	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 118 Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 125 Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 167 (increase further to disrepair claims) Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0	Measure covers those litigation/court proceedings being furthered by legal services.
	number of	Number of new 106 files	Number of new 106 files	Number of new 106 files	The Overview and Scrutiny

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_52 number of new 106 files opened	new 106 files opened	opened - 4			opened – 7			opened – 5			Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review the council's Section 106 process, recommendations available within the final report. S106 Task Group - FinalReport.pdf (moderngov.co.uk) with a S106 Scrutiny Review – Update provides to the committee in May 22
CP_KPI_53 Planning Application Approvals	% of planning applications approved	92%	90%		87%	90%		88%	90%		
<p>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 stabilised to around target. A recent update on the Stodmarsh situation was presented to Cabinet Report Title: (moderngov.co.uk), explaining the progress made towards a mitigation to this strategic issue.</p>											
CP_KPI_54 Speed of	% of major planning applications determined	88%	65%		78%	65%		67%	65%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
Major Planning Application Decisions	within 13 weeks (or within such extended period as agreed in writing between the applicant and the local authority)										
CP_KPI_54 b % 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	77%	75%		76%	75%		71%	75%		

The latest data tables on local government Planning including Ashford Borough Council, covering the speed and quality of planning decisions

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

are available at the following link: [Live tables on planning application statistics](#)




Performance remains good across the broader period in respect of major application determinations. Q1 performance was below par but it was based on just nine cases. Of the three cases determined outside statutory timescales, two were determined without being able to secure agreement to an Extension of Time from the applicant.

CP_KPI_55 Speed of Non-Major Planning Application Decisions	% of minor and other planning applications determined within 8 weeks (or within such extended period as has been agreed in writing between the applicant and the council).	81%	75%		85%	75%		78%	75%		
CP_KPI_55 b % of non	% of non majors determined within 8 weeks	87%	80%		86%	80%		84%	80%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	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 outline, full or reserved matters consent. Reducing backlog with	985	550		792	550		775 (603)	550		Reduction in cases can be seen this quarter although no significant changes to previous quarter commentary.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
	a capacity set at 550 open cases										

Nutrient neutrality requirements related to Stodmarsh lakes continue to be a significant factor that restricts the issuing of planning decisions. Since performance was last reported here, a recent High Court judgement has extended the scope of application types to which the requirement for nutrient neutrality may apply and this has increased the overall number of live cases where Stodmarsh constraints apply.

At the time of drafting this report, 172 live cases (inc. six at appeal) fall into this category leaving a net figure of live NON-STODMARSH cases reflected in the table in (brackets) above. Officers are continuing to take cases to the point where proposals can be agreed in all other respects pending the nutrient mitigation solution.

Agenda Item No: 7

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

[Consultation and Engagement Review – Recommendations Update]

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. To note the progress made in respect of the recommendations made during the Consultation and Engagement Review.
-

Date of O&S meeting: 12 September 2023

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr. N Bell

Relevant Portfolio(s): Policy and Performance

Summary: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review consultation and engagement as part of the 2022/23 work programme.

A review was undertaken over six months and explored the methods of engagement and communication used at the council as well as the public consultation process in place.

The Task Group made eight recommendations to Cabinet which were approved in November 2022. It was agreed that an update on the recommendations was brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2023 to review their progress.

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Papers: [Final Report of the Consultation and Engagement Task Group, 24 November 2022](#)

Contact: Abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330394
Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager

Report Title: Consultation and Engagement Review – Recommendations Update

Introduction and Background

1. During 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group reviewed the council's approach to consultation and engagement. Members were particularly interested in how the council consulted with residents regarding current issues, new policies and projects. Members also wanted to understand what the challenges were with engaging hard to reach groups and compare best practice with other local authorities.
2. The Task Group made eight recommendations in total which were fully supported by Cabinet in November 2022. As part of the recommendations, it was also agreed that an update would be provided during 2023 to review their progress.
3. Table 1 appended to this report sets out the progress made against the eight recommendations so far and considers the next steps.

Recommendations Update

4. A good level of progress has been made during 2023 so far and many recommendations have been actioned. Due to the ongoing nature of many of the recommendations, a next steps column has been included to inform Members of any planned actions.
5. Notably, the creation of a Citizens' Panel was launched in July. The Panel aims to encourage more consultation responses and wider engagement with residents in the Borough. Once residents register their interest to the Citizens' Panel, they are added to a mailing list of people who are interested in responding to our consultations.
6. An internal consultation group has been set up and is expected to meet in later June 2023. The informal group will be an opportunity for Officers to discuss future consultations and assist services with ensuring surveys are fit for purpose. The finalisation of the consultation guidance will be another way that Officers can undertake consultation effectively. In terms of engagement, work is underway to seek a wider variety of views including those of hard to reach groups in the Borough.

Conclusion

7. This report sets out the progress made in respect of the recommendations made during the scrutiny review of Consultation and Engagement. All

recommendations have been addressed following their approval and work will continue to progress these and support future consultations.

Contact and Email

8. Abi Sheppard, Scrutiny and Partnerships
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Table 1: Progress towards the O&S Consultation and Engagement Review Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Progress	Next Steps
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.	A corporate consultation guidance document is being drafted for internal use by Officers when developing consultations in their service.	The guidance was reviewed by the internal consultation group at its first meeting in June and will become available to Officers shortly on the SmartHub.
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.	A pilot of Hello Lamppost was undertaken and was able to gather feedback from residents and visitors on various improvements made in the Town Centre. We are about to embark on another exercise, with housing tenants shortly.	Use of video will be explored as part of the Citizens Panel launch. Work to engage with a wider variety of people is planned by working with the Ashford Volunteer Centre to engage with harder to reach groups on our consultations, for example, getting surveys out through the befriending service. Use of face-to-face opportunities such as the Eat Well, Spend Less roadshows are also being utilised.
III	The use of easy-read versions of consultation papers should be considered for all public consultations.	Easy read versions of surveys have been considered so far for all public consultation.	The use of easy read versions will be considered on a case-by-case basis when consultations are reviewed by the internal consultation group.

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.	The first meeting of the internal consultation group occurred in June 2023. The group includes Officers from Policy and Performance, Housing and the Communications team.	The group will continue to meet quarterly to review the consultation programme for 2023/24 and feedback specifically on surveys and consultations due to be published.
V	A calendar of consultations is produced to ensure that the council can oversee how many consultations are issued to residents during one period.	A calendar of consultations has been developed by the Policy team and approved by the Management Team.	The internal consultation group will review the consultation programme periodically.
VI	Work to increase subscribers to ABC publications should continue to be developed by the Council.	Our e-newsletter subscribers have increased by 40% over the past year. Subscribers March 2020 – 619 March 2023 – 1,019 = 400 sign ups. Strong open rate (between 60-70%) over the last 8 editions. Two thirds of our subscribers read the content. Shows people are finding the content useful/interesting and are reading it/clicking through to the articles on our website. In the e-zine we use one of the feature boxes to promote the latest consultations being undertaken.	As part of the Citizens Panel, we have begun to create a list of subscribers which we can use to contact residents regarding upcoming consultation and consultation outcomes.
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.	An options paper was discussed by the council's Management Team and it was agreed that a Citizens Panel would be set up.	Since its launch in early August, the Citizens' Panel has 104 registered residents. We are now live with the Ashford Mural Project and Events Consultation for Citizens' Panel Members to complete and this is due

		<p>This supported option detailed that the Panel would be managed and maintained by the Policy Team and would work in collaboration with Services who were looking to consult.</p> <p>To help achieve sign up to the Panel, this was launched together with the council's new Customer Portal, 'My Ashford', on 1st August 2023. As people have signed up to the Customer Portal they have been offered the option to also subscribe to the Citizens Panel.</p> <p>The website has been updated to include dedicated Citizens Panel web pages whereby residents can access further information and sign up if they wish.</p>	<p>to close on 5th September 2023. We will then analyse the responses received from the consultation and feedback to services accordingly.</p> <p>The list of people who have subscribed to the Citizens' Panel will be contacted when new consultations are listed and to communicate how their responses are being used to inform our services.</p>
VIII	Residents are engaged with the scrutiny work programme each year using the Council's communications channels.	The scrutiny team has aimed to increase engagement with residents by publishing an article in the Summer edition of the Ashford For You magazine. The article encourages residents to email their ideas for scrutiny topics which will then be considered for the committee work programme.	There are plans to use social media to inform residents of upcoming Committee meetings and encourage attendance by sharing the meeting link for them to join.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2023 to 2024

Current Work Programme			
Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
Council Finance, Budget and Commercial Scrutiny	26 th September 6-8pm	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (external)	This session will help Members of scrutiny to recognise the vital role of scrutiny in helping to constructively test and challenge to council's corporate priorities and the robustness of financial planning to support them. Members should gain an understanding of how scrutiny can test assumptions, risks and pressures that underline budgets and medium-term financial plans. This session will also help Members to develop questioning strategies to test budget and financial plans and hold to account political decision makers for the delivery of their plans.
Waste Contract Implementation	October 2023	Environment, Property and Recreation	A presentation regarding the recent waste contract implementation, the councils recycling rate and goals and updates on issues relating to bin stores and fly tipping collection rates.
Budget Scrutiny Task Group Membership	October 2023	-	An item to agree Membership for the Budget Scrutiny Task Group.
Using information and developing effective questioning skills	17 th October 2023	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (external)	This session, hosted by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny, will provide an opportunity for members to acquire or develop their questioning techniques in a scrutiny setting. The seminar will cover how effective, organised and

			prepared questioning can significantly improve member contributions and overall success of scrutiny sessions.
Freedom Leisure at the Stour Centre	November 2023	Environment, Property and Recreation	Members would like information regarding overall service delivery including general maintenance and cleanliness.
Savings Plan Progress – 1st Quarter 2023/24	November 2023	Finance, IT and Digital	O&S agreed to monitor the delivery of the proposed savings identified on an ongoing and regular basis.
Corporate Performance Report Q2	November 2023	Policy and Performance	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 2. Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Leader's vision and priorities for the next Corporate Plan	December 2023	Chief Executive	The Leader is invited to attend and discuss the vision and priorities for the next Corporate Plan,
Equalities , Diversity and Inclusion	December 2023	Policy and Performance	An overview report of what has been done so far towards promoting equalities, diversity and inclusion at the council.
Housing Delivery and Management	December 2023	Housing	A presentation regarding the delivery of units and housing management operations, including an update on the repairs arrangements.
Budget Scrutiny Meetings 2024/25	December 2023 to January 2024	Policy and Performance Finance, IT and Digital	Scrutiny of the draft budget 2024/25 will take place over three or four meetings during December and January.
Final Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group	February 2024	Finance, IT and Digital	A final report and findings from the annual Budget Scrutiny Task Group will be submitted, including any recommendations for consideration by Cabinet.
Hybrid Working and Productivity Update	February 2024	HR, Customer Services,	An update presentation on a report received by the Committee last September regarding hybrid working and productivity.

		Communications and Digitalisation	
Safeguarding Update	February 2024	Safety and Wellbeing	Annual update to the committee on the council's work on safeguarding adults and children at risk.
Community Safety Partnership Update	February 2024	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.
Corporate Performance Report Q3	February 2024	Policy and Performance	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 3. Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Productivity, Staff Morale and Hybrid Working Task Group	Spring 2024	HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation	The Committee wished to set up a Task Group to look at workforce productivity, staff morale, remote working (including the remote working/hybrid model proposed for the move to international house).
O&S Annual Report	May 2024	Policy and Performance	A report to summarise the work undertaken by the Committee during the last municipal year.
Annual Performance Report	May 2024	Policy and Performance	A report to summarise the council's performance during the last municipal year.
Enforcement Review	TBC	Safety and Wellbeing	The findings of the enforcement review will be brought forward to the Committee once the review has concluded.

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