



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on
Tuesday 13th February, 2024 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

Agenda

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| | To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document: | |
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| | b) Other Significant Interests (OSI) | |
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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 Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **12th December 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair),

Cllrs. Bartlett, Chilton (Vice-Chair), Joseph, Ledger, Shilton, C. Suddards.

In attendance:

Cllrs. Barrett, Ovenden.

Chief Executive; Deputy Chief Executive; Assistant Director Housing; Housing Operations Manager; Development Partnership Manager; Head of Housing Development; Strategic Housing Assets and Compliance Manager; Service Lead Finance; Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager; Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllrs. Feacey, Michael.

Operations Manager – Responsive Repairs; Corporate Director of Housing, Customer, Technology and Finance; Head of Economic Development; Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation; Head of Policy and Performance; Member Services Officer.

245 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 14th November 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

246 Housing Delivery and Management

A joint presentation was given by the Assistant Director Housing, the Development Partnership Manager, the Operations Manager, and the Strategic Housing Assets and Compliance Manager. The presentation covered:

- The backdrop to 2023
- Proposed consumer standards
- Priorities in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Delivering new homes
- Neighbourhood Housing Service and key officers
- Legislative overview
- Tenant satisfaction measures
- The vision for tenant engagement
- Managing the Council's stock – the compliance and planned maintenance programme

- Managing the Council's stock – responding to new regulations
- Additional surveying work
- In-house repairs and performance
- Direct control of repairs.

The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/points were raised:

- A Member noted the tenant engagement and satisfaction work underway and asked whether these measures would feed into the Council's performance management framework. The Assistant Director Housing replied that performance indicators had been identified on the Pentana system, which produced a dashboard of results. It was still necessary to identify the key performance indicators to be reported to Cabinet, and there were proposals to provide a quarterly performance report to Members.
- A Member asked about the transfer of the repairs team from the previous employer. The Assistant Director Housing explained that all appropriate employees had been TUPE'd across to the Council under their existing terms and condition of employment. She was grateful for the support from HR colleagues on this project. She went on to say that the former employer had served notice on the Council as they no longer wished to pursue the contract and she considered that this was an opportunity for the Council to take control of the service. She said that the incoming staff were excellent and had engaged fully in the on-boarding process. The ambition was to develop a smooth process in the service. Phase 1 of the new computer software was in place and phase 2 was underway at present. Much consideration was being given to how the Council could improve customer service, with an emphasis on seeing tenants as customers.
- There was a question about the £5m contingency fund. The Assistant Director Housing advised that this contingency fund was required in advance of the stock condition survey or any changes in legislation which might lead to the need for expenditure. If the funds were not required, they would be reinvested in the service. She confirmed that the funds were in the current business plan.
- A Member asked how estate management would be managed going forward. The Assistant Director Housing said that under current regulation the Council was obliged to take responsibility for maintenance of the communal areas in the HRA, and was currently using the Aspire team for this service. It was the intention to include local Ward Members in estate inspections, and where matters were reported, action would be taken.
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director Housing confirmed that social housing regulations and compliance applied to all social housing landlords. She added that the Council had engaged with other housing providers in the Borough and across the county and had identified best practice across the country. The Development Forum had been set up to engage with other social landlords wanting to develop in the Borough, and a

new Housing Management Forum was commencing to focus on discussions with management from housing associations on good practice in the area.

- A Member noted that there were 12 schemes in the pipeline and he asked what number of units this equated to. The Development Partnership Manager undertook to provide this information to the Member outside of the meeting.
- A Member asked if there had been teething problems with the new in-house service. The Assistant Director Housing said that some issues had already been tackled in the run up to the commencement of the in-house service on 1st December. One of the main issues identified was effective communication with tenants, and well as a high rate of cancelled jobs. Both these issues were being addressed through improved technology and processes. She stressed that it was early days at the moment, and that new officers had only been in post for just over a week.
- A Member raised the issue of damp and mould and the severe health problems which could arise. The Assistant Director Housing said that there was clear guidance to local associations regarding treatment of complaints over damp and mould. Officers would inspect the property to identify if the problem was caused by the fabric of the building, in which case action would be taken. Otherwise, tenants were advised to heat and ventilate properties correctly, although it was appreciated that there may be some reluctance to do this due to the cost of living. Overcrowded homes also aggravated the problem. There were various devices available to monitor and report back to officers on the humidity in a property and the running time of boilers, and officers were currently considering market options for properties most at risk. Correct ventilation and positive pressure units were also being fitted. The electrical team had been trained to install positive ventilation installation units and these were having a positive impact on recurring mould conditions. It was also important to encourage tenants to use the suggested ventilation and heating measures correctly.
- In response to a question the Assistant Director Housing confirmed that it was likely that there were people in hospital who were unable to leave hospital because a suitable property was not available. Officers were working with social workers and the hospital to try and co-ordinate a solution. They also worked closely with KCC. A proportion of properties at Farrow Court had been provided as a step down from hospital. The team also dealt with adaptation requests relatively quickly. The Private Sector Housing team worked with Dover and Canterbury Councils to fund a Discharge Co-ordinator post at the hospital to identify appropriate solutions.
- There was a question about the number of void properties and the Assistant Director Housing advised that there was an average of 8 void properties per week, although some properties were void over the longer term as they required major reparative work.
- A Member asked about staff qualifications and incentives to gain more training. He also asked whether this area was audited. The Assistant Director Housing explained that the Council strongly supported a training

programme for staff, and many of the technical staff had appropriate qualifications. Some management staff were also members of the Chartered Institute of Housing. This area had not yet been audited as clarification was still awaited from government. It was necessary to understand and identify the skill sets required so that a training plan could be put in place in due course.

- In response to a question the Assistant Director Housing confirmed that record-keeping was a current focus for the Housing Ombudsman and the regulator. An improved computer system was in place but the Council were not pursuing any accreditation at present due other priorities. However, this would be kept under review.
- A Member noted that there were 200 households in temporary accommodation at present. He asked how this was budgeted for. The Assistant Director Housing said that this would be eased through an increase in the number of street purchases. Officers were also working with private landlords to encourage them to accept homeless tenants. The in-house social lettings agency service aimed to provide reassurance to private landlords in the management of problem tenants. There was also a focus on the prevention of homelessness through various means. This was becoming harder to achieve in the private rented sector, and therefore the street purchase option had become more pressing.
- The Chairman thanked officers for attending and delivering an excellent presentation. It was agreed that the meeting would receive an update report on the in-house repairs service in a year's time.

Resolved

That the presentation be received and noted.

247 Leader's Vision and Priorities for the next Corporate Plan

The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council introduced this item and gave a presentation which covered:

- The current Corporate Plan 22-24 and rationale for a reduced term of the Plan
- The next Corporate Plan 24-28 – themes and important existing projects
- Stabilising finances
- Strategic projects
- Cost of living – the Council's role
- Next steps for developing the Corporate Plan

The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/points were raised:

- A Member noted that the new Corporate Plan had been developed through discussions between the Cabinet and the Management Team. He said the

Members involved only represented a third of the Borough, and he asked why wider Member input had not been sought. The Chief Executive responded that it was necessary first to identify and formulate the delivery aspirations of the Administration. Once this had been done a first draft would be shared with a wider group for input and feedback. The intention was not to start from scratch but to take forward the work already identified in the Ashford Vision 2030. The Leader added that the intention was to carry forward projects put in place by the previous Administration. This Corporate Plan would be a light touch and would be influenced by financial considerations. There would be an opportunity for consultation with colleagues in due course. He emphasised that the agenda of the Corporate Plan would be put in place by officers, with a steer from Members. The role of Members was to represent residents and feed into the process, but to leave the actual work to officers.

- A Member said he was glad to note that the town centre reset was still considered a high priority. He urged the Leader to involve the Central Ashford Community Forum, county and district Members in discussions on this project.
- A Member noted the income streams from parking and light industrial units. He suggested that consideration should be given to how to maximise the development and use of those units in the broader town centre area. The Chief Executive agreed that such sites had already proved a great success and had provided a growth in income streams. She confirmed that investment opportunities would be pursued. The Leader added that officers were also encouraged to consider the viability of investing in garage sites.
- A Member commented that some commercial estates further out from the town centre also drove revenue streams for the Borough but were looking run down and in need of attention. He questioned how to drive up the value of these estates to provide higher income yields. The Leader said that this theme had been raised by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group. The Commercial Property Team were currently reconsidering the Asset Management Plan and the current approach was to encourage any investment opportunities.
- A Member noted that there was no reference to a vision and priorities for the rural areas. The Leader responded that rural areas were an important part of the Borough, although these were not specifically mentioned in the Plan. Most rural areas were parished, and improvements were delivered through parish precepts. He said it was important to deliver a core set of services to rural residents, but that rural areas should also be encouraged to generate prosperity themselves. The Chief Executive added that rural prosperity information had been sent to all villages. Rural boundaries were set by government and the villages had the ability to bid for funding within their own area. Tenterden Town Council were pleased with the Council's input at the leisure centre and were currently undertaking planning of a Town Hall. The Chief Executive added that communities were engaged in interactive activities and were delivering new innovative projects. The Leader commented that many of the rural areas were affected by the issue of nutrient neutrality and the delay on the delivery of new housing. He acknowledged the need to build an economically prosperous Borough, and not focus on the town centre alone.

- A Member said that the emphasis on environmental impact was welcome. However, in light of this, he asked whether there was any plan to discourage the use of cars. The Leader said that this was not part of the Corporate Plan and that changes would only be made where they were considered affordable and deliverable and in line with the environmental theme.
- There was a question about the Stagecoach service. The Leader advised that he had worked with Stagecoach to support their service to Ashford and the surrounding rural areas. Stagecoach had had to cut some of their services due to financial considerations but had promised to reinstate services wherever possible. However, they had warned that this would be on a 'use it or lose it' basis.
- A Member noted the cost of office space and living in London. He suggested encouraging migration from London to Ashford to drive up the skills, qualifications and capacity of residents. The Head of Economic Development said that work on inward investment had been ongoing via the AshfordFOR project for a few years and it was due for a review. He confirmed that London would continue to be a target to encourage growth in Ashford with a view to greater prosperity and earnings in the Borough. He noted that the residential building around the station, together with changed working patterns arising from Covid, had already encouraged people to resettle in the area. The Chief Executive added that the UK Prosperity Fund money was now in the 3rd year which was boosting the skills agenda locally. The second phase of the Ashford College expansion was complete and the College was considering the 3rd phase, which would provide more opportunity for qualifications locally. The Levelling up Fund aspect of New Town works would also create a college facility on that site for qualifications within the creative industries. The Brompton project was an opportunity to provide engineering and management qualifications to local residents.
- A Member asked whether there were any new initiatives during this Administration. The Leader replied that it was the intention to consider the Corporate Plan halfway through its lifetime to assess the financial situation and decide whether a review was necessary.
- A Member noted that the Council had a good relationship with the government and had cooperated on a number of government schemes in the Borough. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Port Health service would commence in Ashford in April 2024. This was a significant service not just for the Borough but for the whole country, and provided an opportunity for the development of local industry related to the Port Health business. A Member noted that the Council had shown a very 'can do' attitude to various government initiatives, and this should reap benefits going forward.
- There was a question about the Administration's intentions regarding Council Tax. The Leader confirmed that a maximum increase of 2.99 percent was built into the draft budget but advised that the Council's proportion of the Council Tax increase was significantly lower than other preceptors at £5.46 per year. He emphasised that although the task group had agreed on a maximum increase, this would not necessarily be the final outcome. He

pointed out the pressure on services, together with inflation and the need to sustain quality delivery of services in balance with income. In response to a question about Council Tax in future years, the Leader replied that this was a decision to be made on a year-on-year basis and he could not comment on future figures.

Resolved

That the presentation be received and noted.

248 Schedule of Key Decisions

Resolved that the report be received and noted.

249 Work Tracker

Resolved that the report be received and noted.

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Agenda Item 4



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Agenda Item No: 4
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting: 13 February 2024
Report Title: Safeguarding Annual Report
Report Author: Alison Oates
Job Title: Safety and Wellbeing Manager
Portfolio Holder: Cllr. L Wright
Portfolio Holder for: Communities and Health

Cllr. P Feacey
Member Champion for Safeguarding

Summary: This yearly report details how Ashford Borough Council supports the delivery of the priorities set by both the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-agency Partnership (KSCMP) and the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB).

This has been a particularly positive year for the Council in that we received a special mention in respect of our exceptional annual report to the KMSAB. It is through these processes that we also strive to make continual improvements in this area of work to safeguard those most vulnerable, with the ever-changing landscape of challenges that are seen not only locally but are reflected nationally too.

This report provides information on the referrals that the Council has made to the various relevant agencies.

The report details the safeguarding activity that the Council has organised or participated in, including supporting the National Safeguarding Adults Awareness week, improvement to our own training packages and continued awareness raising.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All wards

Recommendations: **The committee is recommended to note the report.**

Policy Overview: The Council's Safeguarding Policy was reviewed in September 2023 and is available on the website. The council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure that all children and adults at risk are protected and kept safe from harm. Safeguarding is relevant to the council's current

Corporate Plan 2022-24 i.e. the Caring Ashford priority theme.

Financial Implications:	None
Legal Implications:	<p>The Children Act 1989 states that the child's welfare is of paramount importance and that every child has the right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under Section 10, 11 and 13 of the Children Act 2004 specifies what is required of local authorities.</p> <p>The Care Act 2014 codified the principles of wellbeing and placed safeguarding adults' duties on a statutory basis. The council's policies and procedures are governed by this act, which provides the legal framework of how local authorities (Kent County Council – KCC) and other parts of the public sector, including the borough council, should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The Counter-Terrorism Act 2015 dictates that all local authorities are vital to the Prevent work, which exists to reduce the risk of people being drawn into terrorism, while under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 the council has a statutory duty to report and provide notification to the National Crime Agency about any potential victims of modern slavery or trafficking.</p> <p>Together, these legislative provisions place stringent responsibilities on local authorities and their partners regarding the general safeguarding of both children and adults at risk.</p>
Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not required for this update report
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	Not applicable
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	Not applicable
Sustainability Implications:	Not applicable
Other Material Implications:	No other material implications

**Exempt from
Publication:**

NO

**Background
Papers:**

Not applicable

Contact:

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Report Title: Safeguarding – Annual Report

Introduction and Background

1. This report covers the period January 2023 to December 2023 and includes:
 - An update on the council's safeguarding policy
 - Accountability and governance arrangements
 - Actions taken
 - Referral update
 - Training update
2. Safeguarding continues to have a high profile with significant political and media focus nationally on high profile cases (Finley Boden; 10 months, Jacob Crouch, 10 months; Suma Begum, 24; Ann King, 88 years) as well as locally.
3. The production of this annual report forms part of the council's measures to meet its safeguarding responsibilities.

Ashford Borough Council's Safeguarding Policy

4. The council's Safeguarding Policy stipulates that an annual review will be undertaken each September by the Safeguarding Lead Officers Group. This was completed in September 2023.
5. The policy was reviewed to ensure it is up to date and aligns with national legislation, along with best practice from around the county. It also emphasizes the need for collaborative work across the council, reflecting local working arrangements with the relevant statutory partners and includes the referral process flow chart.
6. The council's Management Team approved the revised version of the Safeguarding Policy in November 2023 with all associated documents being updated on the council's [website](#) and staff SmartHub.

Accountability and Governance

7. Ultimately, accountability for safeguarding as relevant to the functions of the borough council falls to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive and Management Team are responsible for ensuring that the council's responsibilities and procedures are implemented, monitored and consistently reviewed.

8. The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) is responsible for dealing with reports and concerns about the protection of children, young people and adults at risk appropriately and in accordance with the authority's Safeguarding Policy. If the DSO is unavailable the Deputy DSO (DDSO) or one of the Safeguarding Lead Officers (SLOs) can assist.
9. A Safeguarding Lead Officers Group was established in 2016 and continues to support the DSO. This is an operational group with representatives across the council with key skills and knowledge who can support the council to meet its responsibilities. SLO roles are undertaken on a volunteer basis, on top of the officer's substantive duties and without their dedication and commitment this important work would not happen.
10. SLOs are assigned to the following areas:
 - Adults at Risk
 - Children at Risk, including Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Prevent (preventing extremism)
 - Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
 - Contracts and Procurement
 - Training
11. The DSO is supported by the Specialist Management Support Officer. They assist with organising the SLO group, collating evidence and completing statutory returns to the KMSAB and KSCMP, organising events including those to raise awareness of safeguarding, updating the external and internal websites and sharing relevant information (such as the weekly update to SLOs that includes information from both the adults and children's boards, external training and seminars, Kent and Medway policy and protocol updates, newsletters from external organisations and notification of the publication of Domestic Homicide Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews).
12. **All borough councillors, employees and volunteers are responsible for carrying out their duties in a way that actively safeguards and promotes the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk. They must act in a way that protects them from wrongful allegations of abuse as far as possible, bringing safeguarding concerns to the attention of the DSO or in their absence to the Deputy DSO.**

Work Undertaken

13. SLOs meet at least quarterly to review the council's safeguarding governance, policymaking, procedures, working practices, training and monitoring arrangements. SLOs review recent countywide Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs), Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs), Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) to see if any of the

lessons learnt or recommendations have an impact on the work of the council and its working procedures. In addition, Kent Community Safety Partnership hosts various DHR Lessons Identified Webinars and the KMSAB topical Open Sessions, which relevant officers attend.

14. The council's Management Team receives six-monthly safeguarding reports for strategic review, operational oversight and to cascade information through the organisation.
15. In March 2023 the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement was refreshed. This statement sets out the steps that the borough council will undertake to ensure there is a collaborative approach across the organisation. The review for 2024 is currently underway.
16. In May 2023 the council completed the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB) annual agency report. All KMSAB partner agencies are required to complete this document annually regarding safeguarding activity that took place in the previous calendar year (April 2022 to March 2023). These reports are peer reviewed at the Quality Assurance Working Group and are made available to the Board and Business Group Members. **The Chair of the KMSAB stated that our submission was one of the best that the board had received and would be used as an example of best practice for future returns.**
17. In September 2023 we completed the KMSAB statutory self-assessment framework (SAF) which was subsequently peer-reviewed in November 2023. There are 35 areas that we are assessed on; this is on a RAG rating system (i.e. green – the organisation meets the requirement consistently across the organisation; amber – the requirement is met in part, there may be pockets of excellence and areas for improvement; red – the organisation does not meet this requirement). The peer review panel mainly agreed with our self-assessment, a few minor changes were made. Ashford Borough Council did not score red in any area. Any areas which are not compliant are subjected to an action plan. This can be found at **Appendix A**.
18. The action plan details that there are 11 areas that are amber, however it should be noted that most only require minor activity to become fully compliant. Some of the areas that scored amber relate to county-wide learnings following SARs and are consistent across the majority of agencies. The action plan is allocated to the DSO who will work with the SLOs and Specialist Management Support Officer to complete the actions and ensure full compliance within 12 months.
19. National Safeguarding Adults Awareness Week took place between 20 and 24 November 2023. This is a national event that is hosted by the Ann Craft Trust and that encourages councils, health providers and other organisations to raise safeguarding awareness with the aim of empowering members of the public and staff to act when they are worried about the welfare of another person, or indeed are experiencing abuse/neglect themselves.
20. The theme of this year's event was "Raising awareness of safeguarding best practice" with each day focusing on a different strand; these were:
 - Monday – What's my role in Safeguarding Adults?

- Tuesday – Lets start talking – taking the lead on safeguarding within your organisation.
 - Wednesday – Who cares for carers?
 - Thursday – Adopting a trauma informed approach to safeguarding adults.
 - Friday – Listen, Learn and Lead.
21. Ashford Borough Council was keen to promote awareness of safeguarding and supported this week of action with the public, staff and members in a variety of ways that included:
- Comms messages via the council's social media and the staff SmartHub
 - A display in the Customer Contact Centre, with topical posters and various leaflets available, including the KMSAB leaflet in numerous languages
 - A display in the One You Shop, with leaflets available
 - Providing leaflets to venues such as Repton Connect, Bright City Church and the Ashford Library
 - Although not the same week, raising safeguarding awareness takes place face-to-face at each *Eat Well, Spend Less* roadshow where there is a display, leaflets and merchandise relevant to adults and young people. This information is available to both members of the public and other agencies and voluntary services in attendance
 - Although post awareness week, there are plans to provide leaflets to some of the harder to reach groups in various languages and maintain the availability of leaflets in the Customer Contact Centre
22. There is continuing engagement with the County's Channel Panel to assess and support those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Channel uses existing collaboration between partners to support individuals and protect them from being radicalised.
23. The Assistant Director Contest and Serious Organised Crime (SOC), KCC has a standard agenda item at Ashford Community Safety Partnership meetings; this includes a yearly update on the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) in respect of Ashford.
24. The Kent & Medway Prevent and Serious Organised Crime week of action was scheduled to run alongside the National Safeguarding Adults Awareness Week. As well as raising awareness the week included activities and workshops for community groups and professionals. Details of these were shared with relevant officers.
25. The Ashford Community Safety Partnership Prevent Action Plan has recently been updated for the period 2023-26.

26. Other awareness weeks included the National Hate Crime Awareness Week (October 2023) and Carers Week (June 2023) details of which were shared with staff on the SmartHub.
27. Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum has continued to work closely with the council's Domestic Abuse Coordinator to offer a service to all victims of domestic abuse. The One-Stop-Shop offers a weekly drop in facility and continues to provide support to those in need. There is a multi-use facility in Tenterden where specialists are available once a month to give support and advice and which has resources to deal with emergencies as and when they arise.
28. A Neighbourhood Housing Officer attends the twice-monthly Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings to continue to safeguard adults and children from domestic abuse.
29. The DSO attends the Local Children's Partnership Group and provides input and support for their priority areas.
30. The safeguarding pages on the staff SmartHub were developed to provide additional information and have been updated. The new areas include Making Safeguarding Personal; Mental Health; Suicide and Suicide Prevention; ABC's own procedure in respect of requesting a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR); the Advocacy information sheet has been expanded to outline the various kinds of advocacy. Some of these build on the recommendations made following the safeguarding self-assessments or learning from a safeguarding review.

Referral Update

31. Between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023, the council recorded 38 referrals from officers concerning an adult or child/children; this is an increase of 15 reports as compared to the same period last year. The majority of referrals are linked to adults and are reviewed as part of the Safeguarding Lead Officers meetings. There have been no referrals to the Adult Vulnerability Panel since April 2023, as this meeting was led by Kent Police and ceased in April 2023 under their new neighbourhood policing model; however, this forum was reinstated in January 2024 and this has been welcomed.
32. All referrals are recorded and monthly reviews are conducted by the relevant lead officer to ensure that the matters have been addressed.

Referral Group	1 Jan to 31 Mar 2023	1 Apr to 30 Jun 2023	1 Jul to 31 Sep 2023	1 Oct to 31 Dec 2023
Adult Social Care	4	6	5	6
Adult Vulnerability Panel	1	0	0	0
Children	3	0	6	2

Domestic Abuse	1	1	2	2
Total	9	7	12	10
No of months	3	3	3	3
Average per month	3	2.33	4	3.33

33. Recurring themes within the adult referrals are around self-neglect and mental health; this along with co-occurring conditions (substance use and mental health disorder combination) is reflected nationwide and highlights the growing number of complex cases that are presenting.
34. The Council will shortly be moving to a new county-wide referral recording system, which is specifically in respect of safeguarding. The system allows for the wishes of the person to be recorded (making safeguarding personal) and will also be useful for when a vulnerable person moves from one Kent district to another.

Training

35. The authority is currently 96% compliant for Level 1 safeguarding training (e-learning) and 80% compliant for Level 2 training (virtual face-to-face). The Level 2 compliance is higher than last year. Of the 39 people who have not completed this training, 21 are either new to the role or their last certification has just expired and they are awaiting the next course. Management Team are strongly encouraging relevant staff to book on (and attend) the courses.
36. A process is in place to ensure managers and staff are reminded to book their training once it falls due. If an officer fails to complete their training after three reminders have been issued their manager is then notified to take appropriate action. For Level 2 learning, officers receive a notification 9 months before expiry – this gives them two opportunities to book and attend a course. These are held every March and September.
37. Officers can attend continuous personal development courses based on safeguarding subjects on a regular basis which are facilitated by the KSCMP and KMSAB.
38. The DSO is an associate trainer for the KSCMP and is now trained to deliver the following courses and meets her obligations to the KSCMP by delivering two multi-agency courses per year:
 - a. KSCMP Basic Child Protection course
 - b. KSCMP Child Safeguarding for Designated Practitioners
39. Ashford Borough Council members are able to access safeguarding training: [Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk 2021 \(learningnexus.co.uk\)](http://learningnexus.co.uk)

40. The KCC Prevent Coordinator delivered a bespoke training session to the in-house housing repairs team on 4 December 2023 and this was well received by the attendees.
41. An emerging theme within safeguarding practice is in relation to agencies becoming trauma informed and this will be an area of focus for the DSO in the next year, once she has completed her Trauma Informed Ambassador programme.

Conclusion

42. Ashford Borough Council believes that 'safeguarding is everybody's business' and is committed to ensuring any children, young people or adults at risk are protected from abuse and are provided with opportunities to thrive.
43. As this report shows the last 12 months have been busy with audits, peer reviews and an increase in referrals being managed by the DSO and our SLOs.
44. We will continue to meet our obligations and ensure that the KMSAB and KSCMP priority areas are fully embedded in our safeguarding practises. Our aspiration for 2024/25 is to ensure that the voice of the child or adult at risk is sought, heard, listened to and acted upon and our approach to making safeguarding personal will be developed. We will also engage with wider preventative programmes and link with other workstreams to ensure any harm from abuse and neglect is prevented.
45. Safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk of harm, abuse and neglect will always be a difficult and emotive area of work. This statutory function cannot be done in isolation; it's only truly effective when we work collaboratively and restoratively with our partnership agencies to ensure this is achieved. It is also essential that we safeguard the staff that work in these areas to ensure they themselves do not experience secondary and vicarious trauma.

Portfolio Holder's Views

46. While there can be no room for complacency in such an important field as Safeguarding, this report reflects excellent progress in carrying out our statutory obligations and a willingness to make ongoing improvements which should lead to even better outcomes in future. I would like to thank the Designated Safeguarding Officer and the Safeguarding Lead Officers for all their dedication and hard work for the residents of Ashford.

Cllr Liz Wright

Portfolio Holder for Communities and Health

Member Champion Comment

47. Recent events in the media have underscored the paramount importance of safeguarding, emphasising the need for steadfast commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of our vulnerable residents. I am delighted to note that the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adult Board has recognised our report as exceptional, a testament to the dedication and excellence displayed by our team.

48. I wanted to thank each officer for their unwavering dedication to our community and for ensuring that safeguarding remains at the forefront of our endeavours.

Cllr Peter Feacey

Member Champion for Safeguarding

Contact and Email

49. Alison.oates@ashford.gov.uk, Tel – (01233) 330225

Kent & Medway Safeguarding Adults Board
Self- assessment of organisational arrangements to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of adults at risk
(SAF)

Peer Review – Action Plan


The Peer Review Panel will include at least three representatives from the Quality Assurance Working Group

Panel members will:

- Consider the evidence provided for each requirement
- Determine whether the RAG rating is to be accepted or amended
- Consider the action plan and make additional suggestions if required
- Provide support and challenge.

The following RAG rating will apply:
GREEN – the organisation meets the requirement consistently across the organisation.
AMBER – the requirement is met in part; there may be pockets of excellence and areas for improvement.
RED - the organisation does not meet this requirement.

Organisation	Ashford Borough Council
Name and Job Title of Person(s) attending the Peer Review Panel on behalf of the organisation	Alison Oates - Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Designated Safeguarding Officer Belinda King - Specialist Management Support Officer Vikki Perry - Housing Lead Specialist (Tenancy & Estate Management)
Date of Panel	Tuesday 21 November, 10am – 11:15am (group 1, day 2, session 1)
Panel Members	Bridget Fordham – Medway NHS Foundation Trust Vickie

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
	OUTCOMES FOR, AND THE EXPERIENCES OF, PEOPLE WHO USE SERVICES				
A2	The Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) approach is embedded into the organisation's safeguarding practices. The individual or their advocate/representative is involved throughout, If this has not been possible, the reasons are clearly documented.		<p>Panel members agreed the amber rating.</p> <p>Panel members asked whether the internal referral form to the DSO includes a question on the views and wishes of the individual (as this has been the case for other districts)</p> <p>Alison advised that it does not at the moment, but Ashford will be moving to the QES management system. There will be a mandatory field on this system to capture the views and wishes of the individual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that the QES system development for Ashford includes the mandatory field to capture the views and wishes of the individual. 	Amber
A4	Relevant staff are aware of the range of Advocacy Services in their local area and how to make appropriate referrals		<p>Members felt that this requirement should be rated amber as the evidence provided does not capture the types of advocacy services available. It was suggested that the information provided to staff should provide examples of when each service may be used, to help share learning on the relevance and importance of advocacy.</p> <p> Flowchart for Statutory Advocacy.1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VW to share the flowchart on the types of advocacy service available. (attached) Update advocacy information to reflect the types of advocacy and when they may be used. Once the information above has been created and launched, share examples of awareness raising activity as evidence to support the rating. 	Amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
A8	The organisation promotes awareness of co-occurring conditions (mental health and substance/misuse) and demonstrates processes and person centred practice to overcome any potential barriers to engagement		<p>Panel members suggested this requirement is changed to amber Questions from panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification on the removal of the vulnerability panel and STAR process • Is there awareness of the dual diagnosis protocol Dual Diagnosis Protocol - Kent County Council, which has been re-launched recently? • How are any barriers to engagement mitigated? • Members were not aware of the dual diagnosis protocol. Panel members advised that this has been revised and the team who produced it are raising awareness. • Panel spoke of STAR process. BF asked if concerns were escalated when the vulnerability panel ceased. Alison advised that concerns were escalated and they have been assured that the panels will be re-instated from January. • STARs meeting lead by housing options teams. • Vikki Perry advised that during a meeting social care, it was established that they have a clinic for individuals on the 'green list' on Fridays at the Ashford Gateway, to discuss support. Ashford BC has agreed to send a housing team rep to this meeting • Spoke of findings from SARs and the MARM process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise when vulnerability panels have been re-instated, • Advise how 'green list' clinic works 	Amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
	LEADERSHIP				
B2	The organisation has an accountable operational lead (s) for adult safeguarding. This is explicitly contained within their role profile or job description		<p>Panel members agreed the amber rating and asked what is required to make this green?</p> <p>Alison advised that currently, not all safeguarding leads have safeguarding in their job descriptions, will be sending a letter from HR to confirm their functions within the organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter from HR to safeguarding leads to confirm their safeguarding functions. 	Amber
B5	The organisation actively participates in the work of the KMSAB and/or its Business Group or Working Groups		<p>Panel members agreed an amber rating, would like more evidence and narrative. The panel explained the working group rep process and how the system should work, for example how it works for health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DHR is not a function of the Board (part of CSO) Could reference the districts safeguarding meeting. There are district reps on all of the KMSAB working groups – how is information fed into these reps? Could utilise some of the information from B6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update narrative and evidence 	amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
B6	Feedback from staff within the organisation is used to inform the work of the Board		<p>As above – could consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are agendas from each of the working group meetings shared by the district leads so that all districts can feed in their contribution in advance of the meeting? • Is the Board’s newsletter shared and this will include details of any policy updates and how to get involved. • How seek views from staff on materials produced by the Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update narrative and evidence 	Amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
	SERVICE DELIVERY AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICE				
C2a	The organisation raises awareness of what constitutes a referral for an assessment of care and support needs (section 9) and how to raise this appropriately with the local authority.		<p>Panel members rated this as amber</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members could not see the section on - assessment of care and support - on the safeguarding page, as referenced in the return Members spoke of the reasons why this has been added to the SAF and why it is important to differentiate between a referral for safeguarding and referral for an assessment of care and support needs Members spoke of the ADASS/LGA what constitutes a safeguarding concern document and the flowchart within this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vickie to send the ADASS/LGA what constitutes a safeguarding concern document. Raise awareness with staff on what constitutes a referral for an assessment of care and support needs (section 9) and how to raise this appropriately with the local authority. Update this section and evidence to provide assurance that staff are aware of the different processes in place for making a safeguarding referral and a referral for an assessment of care and support needs. 	Amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
AC 3	The organisation has a clear pathway in place when working with adults at risk who transfer between services and/or areas		Panel members agreed the amber rating	Implementing QES Safeguarding Software	Amber
C6	The organisation seeks feedback from adults with care and support needs (or their advocate/representative) and this informs safeguarding practices and/or the work of the KMSAB		Panel members agreed the amber rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housings strategy and tenant satisfaction survey is being progressed. 	Amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
C8	The organisation has a “did not attend/was not brought policy” which takes into account how to work with individuals where engagement is challenging		<p>Panel members agreed the amber rating and asked for clarification on what action would make this green?</p> <p>Alison and Vikki spoke of current processes – for example: Will work with housing colleagues, how engage if are missing appointments to make sure that they are seen.</p> <p>Vikki – will knock and speak to neighbours if have concerns, if have further concerns – contact 101</p> <p>Alison and Vikki advised that they want to add to training – how record non-attendance and consider the risk and mitigations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with housing colleagues to provide more narrative and evidence. • Update the training as suggested. 	Amber

	Requirement	RAG Rating 2023	Panel Member Comments	Action Required (if applicable)	Panel RAG Rating
	PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT				
D6	The organisation has systems/processes in place to ensure that staff training is commensurate with their adult safeguarding duties and lawful responsibilities		<p>Members agreed an amber rating</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the current compliance rates? • Is there a training matrix/competency framework? May wish to refer to the <u>KMSAB one Kent and Medway SAB - KMSAB Training</u> <p>Alison summarised some of the current training and suggested that she meet with the learning and development to discuss a matrix/compliance levels.</p> <p>Level 2 - all managers and frontline staff (teams training)</p> <p>Landscape gardeners – receive yearly in person safeguarding training.</p> <p>Compliance is reported to management teams – 2 x per annum.</p> <p>Spoke of refuse collectors – this is an outsourced contract – Alison felt safeguarding training could be included in the new tender.</p> <p>Repair contract – previously, have reported concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion with Learning and Development to develop a matrix. • Consider training for refuse collectors (in new tender). 	Amber

Agenda Item 5



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Agenda Item No: 5

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 13th February 2024
Thursday 22nd February 2024

Report Title: Performance Report, Quarter 3 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 3 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 3 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:

These performance reports provide 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 3 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. These reports seeks to provide an overview of performance against the council's key performance indicators on a quarterly basis. 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 3 - 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
<p>Green Pioneer</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Tackling climate change by achieving carbon neutrality</p> <p>Enabling development whilst protecting the environment</p> <p>Ensuring no one is disadvantaged as we reduce the carbon footprint of our services and operations</p>	<p>GP1: Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets</p> <p>GP2: Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable lifestyles</p> <p>GP3: Reduce the amount of waste produced from homes and business</p>	<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
<p>Caring Ashford</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Enabling homes that are affordable to local people on low incomes</p> <p>Improving wellbeing and opportunities for people living in the most disadvantage areas</p> <p>Raising educational attainment and skills level of local population</p>	<p>CA1: Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely</p> <p>CA2: Local people have access to life-long learning to ensure they have knowledge and skills to take up local employment</p> <p>CA3: Reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people</p> <p>CA4: Communities celebrate their heritage and the diversity of their population to build a more connected community and strengthen social responsibility</p>	<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
<p>Targeted Growth</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Ensuring our towns remain vibrant places and adapt to changing consumer habits</p> <p>Matching local skills with the needs of employers</p> <p>Attracting new industries to establish in borough and retain and grow existing business</p>	<p>TG1: Increase productivity and job opportunities and the establishment of sustainable, knowledge based and creative industries in the borough</p> <p>TG2: Enable the improvement of digital infrastructure to support the growing needs of business, voluntary sector and residents</p> <p>TG3: Strengthen local supply chains and increase the resilience of the local economy</p> <p>TG4: Support growth in the visitor economy</p> <p>TG5: Stimulate vibrant, accessible and sustainable Town Centres for residents visitors and business</p>	<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

Heat Networks

We are working with central government and our appointed consultants AECOM to understand the possibility of developing a District Heat Network (DHN) in Ashford.

This could help us decarbonise and move away from using fossil fuels, such as gas, and using renewable energy and waste heat to warm our buildings instead.

Ashford Borough Council has been successful in securing some funding to explore the viability of a heat network for Ashford.

Grants available to provide energy efficiency and clean heating upgrades to low-income households in Ashford

A grant scheme has been launched to provide energy efficiency and clean heating upgrades to low-income households in the Ashford borough.

Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2) is a new Government grant scheme to fund energy-saving upgrades for residents with 'off-grid' gas heating systems who are most likely to be impacted by the high cost of energy bills.

The grant will pay for improvements which could help local people to use less energy, reduce their carbon footprint and spend less on energy bills. The scheme is funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and Ashford Borough Council has signed up to support the delivery of the scheme across the district.

E.ON has been appointed as the approved installer in this area and they will be on hand to guide customers through the application journey, helping them understand and establish eligibility for the scheme. If eligible, E.ON will identify which improvements for the home will provide the greatest benefits and arrange any necessary surveys and installations.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_06 Active travel plans cycling/walking	<p>October update – Following internal reorganisation, Cycling and Walking has moved back to being the responsibility of the Projects and Recreation team, who now have the resource and capacity to drive this important work stream forward.</p> <p>The period has seen -</p> <p>The reviewing of current Active Travel plans with previous Culture department. Route9 identified (Outlet village connecting Town) as route of interest & Wye crossing which Sustrans has undertaken as self-funded feasibility study.</p> <p>Internal discussions held on Active Travel plan for Staff with a communications plan to commence from early 2024.</p> <p>Meetings held with Tenterden Town Council to offer support and guidance and with KCC planners to review their funding and plans for Ashford routes.</p>							<p>January update - A new Draft Active Travel Strategy is being developed in line with ABC LCWIP (local) and KCWIP (Kent).</p> <p>A communications plan for ABC staff Active Travel will be launched in the Spring.</p> <p>KCC have commenced a public consultation on priority routes they have identified in the county.</p> <p>Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan Let's talk Kent</p>			

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_09 Recycling Rate	% of borough waste recycled or composted	53%	50%		53.33%	50%		51% (October data only)	50%		Defra's nationwide recycling league tables - Local authority collected waste: annual results tables (Historical) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

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.	99.73%	99.96%		99.77%	99.96%		99.8%	99.96%		
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New waste contract with Suez will commence on the 24th March 2024 further information available at [New waste and recycling contract commencing March 2024 \(ashford.gov.uk\)](#)

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

Caring Ashford

Highlights from the Quarter




Ashford's 30 year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan is balanced and affordable despite "perfect storm of pressures"

Ashford's 30 year Business Plan for its Housing Revenue Account sets out clear priorities and succeeds in balancing the books in difficult times to continue to deliver services that are important for our tenants.

Following a November meeting, Cabinet Members heard that the plan had been compiled amid a 'perfect storm' of uncontrollable external factors and pressures – higher interest rates and inflation, the multiple demands on the council caused by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, the cost of living crisis, which is increasing temporary accommodation burdens on the General Fund, and the fact that Stodmarsh nutrient neutrality issues continue to restrict the delivery of the new homes in our affordable homes programme pipeline.

Councillors were told that the plan remains "balanced, affordable and viable" and the council is able to deliver on the construction, decarbonisation, management and tenant engagement priorities of the HRA.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 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	98.2%	98.5%		97.7%	98.5%		97.8%	98.5%		

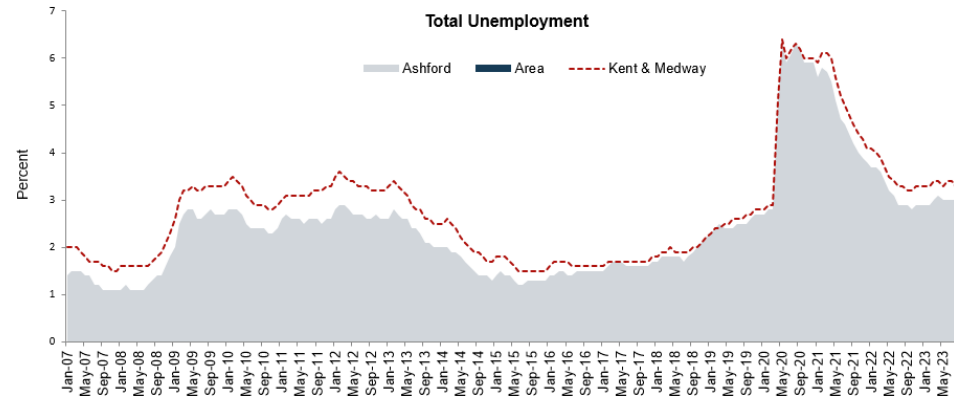
We continue to support food businesses by providing advice, signposting and taking enforcement action where necessary.

CP_KPI_17 Council Affordable Housing - New Build	No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	0			0			10			<p>In this quarter the council acquired 10 homes in High Halden on the site known as Wildflower Grove, or land behind Hope House. There were 6 rental and 4 shared ownership homes.</p> <p>4x 3 bed houses shared ownership</p> <p>2x 3 bed houses affordable rent</p> <p>3x 2 bed houses affordable rent</p>
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
											1x 4 bed house affordable rent
Housing Revenue Account HRA Business Plan 2022 -2052 including Financing and Affordable Homes Pro.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)											
CP_KPI_18 Council Affordable Housing - On-Street Purchases	No. of additional on-street purchase affordable homes delivered by council housing	2			1			2			The Council completed on 2 street purchases for the HRA stock in this quarter.
CP_KPI_19 Homelessness Presentations New Triage Cases	No. of new triage cases	733			620			551			New approaches to the service throughout the period
CP_KPI_19b Homelessness Preventions (still	No. of households where homelessne	33			33			48			Successful preventions throughout period

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
in accommodation)	ss was prevented										
CP_KPI_20 Disabled Facilities Grants Completed	No. of disabled facilities grants administered by the council	25			24			26			75 Completed cases since April. On course to complete 90 DFGs this year.
CP_KPI_20b Disabled Facilities Grant Spend	Actual spend per quarter for disabled facility grants	£328,260.04			£248,246.35			£286,163.47			

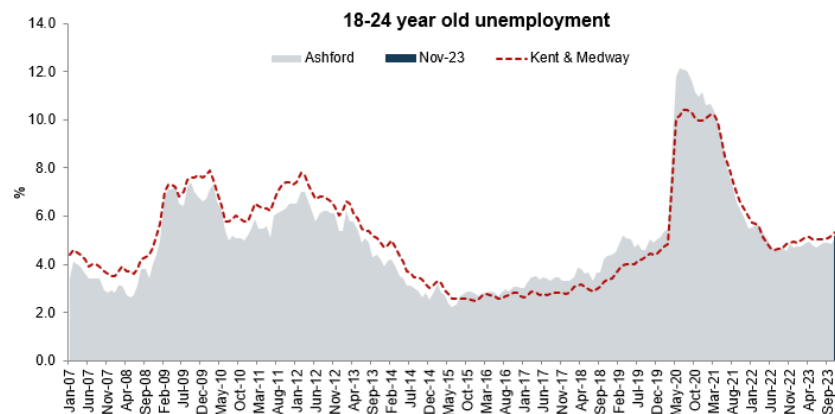
Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_21 Unemployment	Unemployment figures taken monthly from Kent County Councils Economy and employment data.	3%			3%			3.1%			November (latest available data) - 3.1% or 2535 residents slight increase on previous months - Kent average 3.4% More information available within - Economy and employment data - Kent County Council



November 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	2,535	3.1%	+105	+4.3%	+205	+8.8%
Kent & Medway	39,140	3.5%	+1,000	+2.6%	+2,135	+5.8%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 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	4.8%			4.9%			5.2%			November figures - 18-24 5.2% or 475 residents - increase of 30 on the previous month. Now equal to the Kent average of 5.2% 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	475	5.2%	+30	+6.7%	+30	+6.7%
Kent & Medway	7,350	5.3%	+150	+2.1%	+575	+8.5%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

At the previous O&S Committee, where the Q2 performance report was discussed, it was asked that more detail on what connections ABC had with the Job Centre and other partners including the College to aid with 18-24 unemployment.

We have been in contact with the Labour Market Recruitment Specialist at DWP Job Centre Ashford, and promote what DWP can offer businesses based in the borough by way of support with recruitment. Additionally we have promoted the job fair that has happened on the 24th January organised by Damian Green MP.

The Labour Market Recruitment Specialist now attends our town centre business forums ensuring Ashford Town Centre businesses can make contact quickly to support the issue of recruitment for retail and hospitality businesses. We have also helped Netomnia (one of the broadband providers installing FTTP in Ashford) with a recruitment drive.

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We can report that with regards to the College we sit on the Local Ashford College Board to co-ordinate support and activity. We also have an MOU with the College and are supporting apprentices and T – Level work placements within ABC in IT and HR. We are also working with all partners on commissioning UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects that will provide additional programmes to deliver short courses and skills to support people back into work.

The Welfare Intervention Officers and Employability and Skills Officer have regular contact with the work coaches at the Job Centre.

The Employment & Skills Officer, runs a Job Club out of the KCC IT suite at the Gateway on a Friday morning and runs another Job Club on a Monday morning out of JCP (opposite International House).

Additionally we help to run the Employment & Training forum which currently has over 50 members.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 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	2.1	10		2.29	10		2.3	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	24.94	28		21.11	28		20.69	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 56,306 tickets sold			Since start of scheme 70,563 tickets sold 11,862 tickets sold in the quarter.			Since start of scheme 78,655 tickets sold 10,573 tickets sold in the quarter.			

A total of 78,655 tickets have been sold since the scheme began to the end of 2023. 10,573 were sold in the last quarter. Sales remain consistent across the quarters. An additional month of sales was counted in the previous quarter and actual ticket sales for Q2 were 11,862 rather than the 14,257 reported.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 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	Latest data from Freedom leisure's quarterly monitoring report covering - 1st September 2023 to 30th November 2023									
		<u>New in this quarter:</u>									
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walking Cricket: An expansion of the walking programme in Ashford, which has seen a weekly walking cricket session set up, working in partnership with Kent Cricket Community Trust. A slowed-down version of the outdoor game. • Sensory Football: Ashford Sensory Football Club runs a weekly football session, specifically targeted at a key demographic. The club is the only one in Kent to offer this type of session that attracts participants from across the whole of Kent. A safe and welcoming environment, that gives both the participants and parents an opportunity to relax and have fun. • Refugee Cricket: Working in partnership with Kent Cricket Community Trust, a weekly session has been set up to run an indoor Cricket session for the local refugee community. This gives the local community the opportunity to try or continue playing a sport they love. • One You Kent: A partnership has been set up with One You Kent for monthly visits to the Stour to deliver NHS Health Checks and Blood Pressure checks for the centre members. One You Kent also links up with Julie Rose Stadium to deliver the same checks at both Freedom Leisure venues in Ashford. 									
		<u>Ongoing projects and activities:</u>									
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swim School: Swim school is continuing to grow, providing the opportunity for so many local children the chance to learn to swim. Expansion of more schools to have more children learn to swim in place for next year. • Walking Football: Ongoing sessions that take place twice a week, a key element of the planned expansion of the Walking Programme provision across the Ashford Contract. • Walk 2 Jog: A long-term and established project at Julie Rose Stadium that tackles inactivity, loneliness and isolation. • Kent Refuge Football: Regular slot on Sunday in collaboration with Kent Refuge UK to offer sports opportunities for refugee children. 									

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
Freedom Leisure at the Stour Centre - Presentation providing information regarding overall service delivery including general maintenance and cleanliness, given to O&S committee in November.											

Targeted Growth

Highlights from the Quarter

Ashford's stag mural nominated for "Best Mural in the World 2023"

"Flamboyant Fawn", the giant mural of a stag painted by artist Curtis Hylton in Ashford Town Centre (Kent), has been nominated for the Best Street Art in the World Award, via Street Art Cities.

Street Art Cities, who receive daily uploads from over 1200 cities, announced their shortlist for the Best Street Art in the World for 2023 this week, with entries from Brazil, Portugal, Hong Kong and more.

Ashford's stag won the "Best in March" category last year, so it would be an incredibly accolade to win the "Best in the World". The stunning large-scale artwork on the side of Bucksford Law, in Hylton's signature style, shows a proud young stag standing in brushland amidst autumnal ferns, curiously watching a nearby pheasant.

The Ashford Unframed Mural Festival, curated by Accent London and The London Mural Company, ran throughout April 2023 and saw 18 pieces of street art create a mural trail around the town centre. The majority of the pieces are still in situ and the trail map is still available via loveashford.com

Grants now available for rural businesses and communities in the Ashford borough

Ashford Borough Council has successfully secured funding from UK Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) following our proposed Plan for how we would spend our allocation being accepted.

Alongside the allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Ashford Borough Council has been awarded £593,000 REPF funding, specifically to support rural areas in the borough up to March 2025.

Following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and expressions of interest, Ashford's REPF plan, approved by government, sets out four capital grant schemes aimed at filling gaps in support for businesses and organisations and deliver on REPF objectives. These are:

Rural Green Business Grant – to provide grants to support energy efficiency or energy transition projects in commercial premises in rural parts of the borough.

Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Point Grant – to provide grants to support the installation of Electrical Vehicle Charging Points at publically accessible parking sites in rural areas of the borough.

Rural Place and Provenance Grant – to provide grants to support rural food and drink producers, hospitality and tourism attractions or venues to increase productivity and sustainability for businesses, support the creation of start-up spaces and tackle the ‘Last Mile’ challenge in rural areas.

Community Amenities Grant (Round 2) – to provide grants using REPF and UKSPF funding for improvements to community infrastructure such as village halls or outdoor play areas. Following a successful first round for the 2023/24 financial year, further UKSPF and REPF funding has been allocated for projects proposed in the 2024/25 financial year.

Ashford’s Carnival of the Baubles brings thousands of people into the Town Centre

On Saturday 25 November, thousands of residents lined the streets of Ashford Town Centre as the Carnival of the Baubles once again kicked off the festive season.

The day was fun-filled from start to finish, with the team from Made in Ashford running craft workshops at the bandstand and performances throughout the day to keep the crowds entertained on what indicators show was the busiest day in the Town Centre for many years.

The crowds then gathered at Elwick Place, where performances from TheatreTrain Ashford, Circadian and other local dance schools entertained the crowds before the team from Elwick Place illuminated the plaza with a spectacular lights switch on.

Farrah the Fox, a giant mechanical puppet, then appeared, music filled the air and the confetti cannon signaled the beginning of the procession of lights, which alongside Farrah, was led by students from TheatreTrain Ashford and the man himself, Father Christmas, who danced his way up the street greeting the crowds.

New schemes launched to support businesses in the borough

Ashford Borough Council has launched three new schemes to support businesses in Ashford Town Centre and the wider borough.

Ashford Town Centre Business Grants

The new town centre business grants scheme, will 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 in 2021/22, Cabinet agreed in July, to use £140,000 of section 106 funding (from the Designer Outlet expansion) to deliver this grants scheme.

The other two schemes are both Government funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and are aimed at supporting businesses not just in Ashford Town Centre but also the wider borough.

Ashford Borough Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise Support programme

The council has joined forces with Social Enterprise Kent to launch an initiative aimed at providing critical support to the thriving community of charities and social enterprises within the Ashford Borough.

On the Map: Ashford and Tenterden's Visitor Economy Programme

The council has also joined forces with Visit Kent to launch the On the Map project which has been designed to support the development of new visitor experiences that showcase the incredible local produce available in the borough. The aim is to create exciting new products and experiences by linking together different types of visitor economy businesses – both existing and start-ups.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 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	9.2%			9.4%			9.9%			

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.

Date	No of props	Exemptions	Empty 'Reliefs'
01-Jul-23	5437	306	197
01-Oct-23	5442	298	217
01-Jan-24	5452	320	222

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note																																								
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status																																									
CP_KPI_34 Ashford town centre vacancy rate	Ashford town centre vacancy rate	15.2%			15.2%			14.3%			<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date</th> <th>Total number of units surveyed</th> <th>Number of units vacant</th> <th>% of units vacant</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Oct-21</td> <td>331</td> <td>51</td> <td>15.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jan-22</td> <td>331</td> <td>49</td> <td>14.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apr-22</td> <td>332</td> <td>51</td> <td>15.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jul-22</td> <td>335</td> <td>52</td> <td>15.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct-22</td> <td>335</td> <td>50</td> <td>14.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jan-23</td> <td>335</td> <td>51</td> <td>15.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apr-23</td> <td>335</td> <td>48</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jul-23</td> <td>335</td> <td>51</td> <td>15.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct-23</td> <td>335</td> <td>48</td> <td>14.3%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date	Total number of units surveyed	Number of units vacant	% of units vacant	Oct-21	331	51	15.4%	Jan-22	331	49	14.8%	Apr-22	332	51	15.4%	Jul-22	335	52	15.5%	Oct-22	335	50	14.9%	Jan-23	335	51	15.2%	Apr-23	335	48	14.3%	Jul-23	335	51	15.2%	Oct-23	335	48	14.3%
Date	Total number of units surveyed	Number of units vacant	% of units vacant																																																
Oct-21	331	51	15.4%																																																
Jan-22	331	49	14.8%																																																
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Jul-22	335	52	15.5%																																																
Oct-22	335	50	14.9%																																																
Jan-23	335	51	15.2%																																																
Apr-23	335	48	14.3%																																																
Jul-23	335	51	15.2%																																																
Oct-23	335	48	14.3%																																																

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 above national benchmarks, which were 11.2% at the end of 2023.

[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	Contribution to budget from commercial investments utilising the budgeted	85%			91.6%			78.98%			Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
	figures provided as part of the councils budget books.										

The Corporate Property Annual Performance Report 2022/23 reviewing revenue performance of the Council's corporate property portfolio during the financial year, as well as advising on its expected future performance: [Report Title: \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](http://modern.gov.co.uk)

Fall in anticipated collections due to the vacancy of the formal Wilkos site and a lower than anticipated collection figures for Elwick Place.

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CP_KPI_36 Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	Vacancy rates (in our corporate property)	10.5%	9.3%	9.4%	
		Site	Square foot let	Total square foot	Percentage let
		Ellingham	60,897 sf	64,397 sf	94.6%
		Carlton Road	42,065 sf	42,065 sf	100.0%
		Elwick Place	92,486 sf	104,391 sf	88.6%
		International House	65,087 sf	76,714 sf	84.8%
			260,535 sf	287,567 sf	90.6%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

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.

CP_KPI_38	Digital uptake - % of total council /% Increase transactions completed electronically .	90.95	80		90.97	80		95.63	80		95.63% December - A lot of bin collection views over the Christmas period which has resulted in a higher average digital uptake figure.
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Month	Digital Transactions	Calls	Total Transactions	Digital Uptake
Oct-23	72196	6441	78637	91.81%
Nov-23	71920	5970	77890	92.34%
Dec-23	101202	4630	105832	95.63%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_39 Social media engagement	Social media engagement	<u>Q1 (Apr-June)</u>			<u>Q2 (July- Sept)</u>			<u>Q3 (Oct – Dec)</u>			
		Impressions: Facebook: 572,290 Twitter ('X'): 57,012 Nextdoor: 102,792 Instagram: 8,588			Impressions: Facebook: 584,786 Twitter ('X'): 18,881 Nextdoor: 99,279 Instagram: 2,760			Impressions: Facebook: 620,668 Twitter ('X'): 24,478 Nextdoor: 121,755 Instagram: 6,865			
		Followers: Facebook: 11,312 Twitter ('X'): 9,103 Nextdoor: 28,400 Instagram: 2,755			Followers: Facebook: 11,646 Twitter ('X'): 9,066 Nextdoor: 28,832 Instagram: 2,793			Followers: Facebook: 11,856 Twitter ('X'): 9,039 Nextdoor: 29,257 Instagram: 2,839			

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.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_41 Parking usage	Parking usage Ashford and Tenterden car parks	262,691			307,984			323,630			

To help encourage footfall into the borough, two full weekends of free parking was provided in all car parks in Ashford and Tenterden during December, this is reflected in a drop in the income figures for the period.

Ashford Town Centre income –

Period	Status	Value
December 2023		£169083.74
November 2023		£227068.92
October 2023		£220299.20

Tenterden icome –

Period	Status	Value
December 2023		£86705.25
November 2023		£99106.23
October 2023		£95309.85

Our Principles

Highlights from the Quarter

Government tells UK traders that Ashford will be responsible for SPS checks at Sevington Border Control Post

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has written to British businesses who trade with Europe to explain that Ashford Borough Council will be the enforcement authority responsible for Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) checks at Sevington Border Control Post. These measures ensure that food traded is safe to eat, and that animals and plants are free from pests and disease.

Full Council decision on Civic Centre move proposals

Ashford Borough Council's proposed relocation from the Civic Centre to International House was endorsed by councillors at an Extraordinary Meeting held in November.

Now the plans have been approved, it will mean that the council will save around £1.3m per year, without impacting on services delivered to our residents.

Earlier this year the council announced the authority is looking at the possibility of relocating from the Civic Centre offices, as part of wider budget saving ideas. The council confirmed it is facing some significant budget challenges over the coming years.

Council renews pledge to lead the way in broadband provision

A review of Ashford Borough Council's commitment to improving broadband and digital connectivity has highlighted many successes over the past year – and identified that more needs to be done to ensure that all local residents and businesses benefit from access to fast and reliable internet connections.

A report to Cabinet in September reminded members that the council has been pro-active in its approach to improving broadband and digital connectivity for many years – a policy that is embedded in the Local Plan and which forms a cornerstone of ABC's own Corporate Plan.

Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 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	99%	95%		98%	95%		98%	95%		178 requests received in the period - 2 answered outside the required 20 working day window.
CP_KPI_43 Business Rates Collection	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month	29.1%	24.75%		57.13%	49.5%		82.28%	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	30.03%	24.57%		57.83%	49.14%		85.4%	73.71%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

At the previous O&S Committee, where the Q2 performance report was discussed, it was highlighted that the Council tax collection amount was slightly lower than in previous years (for the previous Q4 period).

In terms of council tax collection, it is important to remember that the figure reported relates to **in-year** collection only (e.g. amount of 2023/24 council tax due that is collected in the 2023/24 year). Once the year has passed, the actual collection figure will continue to increase and eventually be over 99% (i.e. in future years, arrears are collected by the Recovery Team).

Our in-year collection has been as follows (98.25% has always been a deliberately challenging target, and one that was unrealistic during the covid years)

Year End	Actual	Target	Variance
March 2018	98.17%	98.25%	-0.08%
March 2019	98.11%	98.25%	-0.14%
March 2020	98.10%	98.25%	-0.15%
March 2021	96.70%	98.25%	-1.55%
March 2022	97.40%	97.60%	-0.20%
March 2023	97.50%	98.25%	-0.75%

As for this year, we are currently on track to collect a similar level to last year, most likely somewhere between 97.5 – 97.75%. This is **in-year** collections.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_46 Gas Safety Certificates	% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	100%	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		9.68 days		9.8 days		10.3 days		Sickness absence per employee Q3 2023/2024 01 October 2023 to 31 December 2023.
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A total of 1,267.02 days were lost due to sickness absence during the quarter 01.10.23 to 31.12.23; annualised this figure would be 5,068.08. FTE at 31.12.23 was 491.66. Therefore, total days sickness per FTE (annualised for a 12-month period) equals 10.3 days. Please note that this is a winter quarter which has been annualised and absence levels are higher during this peak period of seasonal illnesses

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_48 Average Speed of Customer Service Calls Answered	Average wait time for customer service calls	0h 01m 12s	0h 01m 38s	✔	0h 01m 20s	0h 01m 38s	✔	0h 00m 48s	0h 01m 38s	✔	Remains on target.

CP_KPI_51 number of ongoing litigation/court proceedings (volume measure)	number of ongoing litigation/court proceedings (Volume measure)	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 167 (increase further due to disrepair claims) Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 140 Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 153 Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0	Measure covers those litigation/court proceedings being furthered by legal services.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_52 number of new 106 files opened	number of new 106 files opened	Number of new 106 files opened – 4			Number of new 106 files opened – 3			Number of new 106 files opened – 9			
		Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 1			Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 5			Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 2			
		Number of 106 cases completed - 0			Number of 106 cases completed - 2			Number of 106 cases completed - 2			

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_53 Planning Application Approvals	% of planning applications approved	87% revised figure 88%	90%		86%	90%		80%	90%		

The national average performance for the percentage of planning applications approved is usually around 87 to 88%. Last July, the Council published its Good Practice Guide for non-major planning applications in order to ensure that cases are determined within statutory time periods in the large majority of cases. As expected that, in the short term, has resulted in more refusals being issued than previously as cases have been determined within statutory timescales rather than extended through one or more 'extension of time' agreement with the applicant.

As demonstrated elsewhere this has led to a continued fall in the number of live planning applications being handled by the Service and a gradual erosion of the application backlog that had built up previously. The additional capacity this has afforded within the service has enabled the limited re-introduction of the non-major pre-application advice service at the start of January 2024. This will enable more applicants to seek informal officer advice prior to a formal application being submitted which, in turn, should see a greater proportion of submitted applications being acceptable in principle. Officers will closely monitor the success rate in appeal decisions on refused applications to ensure that the balance between timeliness and quality in decision-making is retained.

It is worth stating that if the Council were to refuse applications that are constrained by Stodmarsh and which have no potential to deliver the necessary mitigation on-site, then the value of this indicator would be lower, hence it remains appropriate to hold those schemes that are otherwise acceptable in planning terms pending a strategic nutrient mitigation solution becoming available, rather than determine them.




Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
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)	44% - revised figure 67%	65%		67% - revised figure 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	63% - revised figure 74%	75%		66% - revised figure 74%	75%		65%	75%		End of Q2 23/24 signified the end of the most recent designation review period (21-23). This is a 24 month period measuring performance of the LPA on speed of determination for major applications. The designation threshold is 60%.




Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

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

A review of the data published in those data tables flagged up some inconsistencies with those published for the same indicators on Pentana and the revised figures reported above now reflect consistent data reporting. As the number of major applications being determined is small (often single figures each quarter), a small inaccuracy leads to a magnified change in the percentage. In practice, only 6 decisions had been incorrectly reported on Pentana in this category.

Performance in Q3 for this indicator was good (88%) and maintains the Council's position against the rolling 24 month target where it should be noted that the Government minimum target is 60%.






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).	77% - revised figure	75%		87% - revised figure	75%		80%	75%		
		78%			84%						

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_55 b % of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	% of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	84%	80%		84% - revised figure 83%	80%		83%	80%		

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](#)

As in the previous table, minor inconsistencies in the reporting of data have been regularised and the revised figures above reflect those reported to Government in formal performance returns. For non-major application performance, this is inconsequential.

Performance in determining non-major schemes has dipped slightly in Q3 but remains above target. This will be as consequence of focusing on the determination of a number of older cases where extensions of time could not be agreed with the applicant (usually in a 'refusal' scenario). The introduction of the Good Practice Guide last July is expected to consolidate and improve performance here once 'backlog' cases are determined and reduce the reliance on agreed 'extensions of time' with applicants to achieve good performance.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
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 a capacity set at 550 open cases	775	550		712	550		655	550		
Number of live planning casework reducing backlog		(541)			(471)						

Q3 has seen a continuation of the steady reduction in the overall caseload of live cases within the Service. Numbers of decisions being issued has consistently been higher than new cases being received and managers have been proactively working with officers to focus on the handling of older cases alongside the introduction of the Good Practice Guide to encourage the efficient processing of non-major schemes. This has allowed for the re-introduction of the non-major pre-application service at the start of 2024 and as pre-app cases are reflected in these figures, it is anticipated that the decline in overall caseload may level off as we move forward.

Nutrient neutrality requirements related to Stodmarsh lakes continue to be a significant factor that restricts the issuing of planning decisions. At the time of drafting this report, 184 live cases (inc. those at appeal) fall into this category leaving a net figure of live NON-STODMARSH cases reflected in the table (in brackets) above. This 'net' figure has now fallen well below the overall target figure. Officers will closely examine how many of these applications can provide and secure suitable nutrient mitigation so that they can be permitted whilst continuing to take other cases to the point where proposals can be agreed in all other respects pending an off-site or strategic nutrient mitigation solution.

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Agenda Item No: 6

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 13 February 2024

Report Title: Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Report Author & Job Title: Abi Sheppard
Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager

Task Group Chairman: Cllr. N Bell



Summary: The Overview and Scrutiny Budget Scrutiny Task Group has scrutinised the council's draft 2024/25 budget over four meetings during December and January. The Task Group have made eight 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 Task Group recommends to the Cabinet that:**

- I. Priority is given to exploring options to develop revenue raising assets, for example, industrial units at the Ninn Lane site subject to satisfactory business modelling.
- II. The temporary accommodation budget may now be insufficient to meeting further increased demand in homelessness representations. It is proposed that the budget is increased by £445,000 to reflect the increased demand and forecasting.

The Task Group also supports the exploring of opportunities to acquire new sites/buildings for temporary accommodation in order to reduce the long-term impact on the general fund revenue costs.

- III. The Chief Executive undertake a further review of the senior management structure during 2024/25 with the objective of making further financial savings.
- IV. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) showing data for planning applications is broken down to show the difference between cases currently held up by Stodmarsh, and those not.
- V. Swift action is undertaken by the Assistant Director of Planning and Development to make an appeal to central Government over the decision not to increase (double) retrospective planning fees, and lobby them to do so.
- VI. The income loss assumed as a result of the proposed increase to garden waste collection fees be revised and consider increasing this budget by £60,000.

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group recommends to the Committee that:

- VII. A report is brought forward to the Full O&S Committee in 2024/25 to provide an update on the results of the condition survey of the Councils Commercial Portfolio, and how this will inform future repairs and maintenance programmes and disposal strategy.
- VIII. Representatives from Arlingclose are invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the council's treasury management strategy.

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 2024/25 budget , report to Cabinet 30 November 2023 Minutes of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group meetings are included in the Appendix.
Contact:	<p>Abi Sheppard, Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330394</p> <p>Lee Foreman, Service Lead Finance Lee.foreman@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330509</p>

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 2024/25 within this report.

Report of the Chairman of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

2. **To be confirmed.**

Summary

3. 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.
4. The draft budget for 2024/25 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 corporate property, asset condition and asset maintenance programme.
 - b. Risks linked to the commercial property portfolio.
 - c. Details around preparations for the Local Plan and the use of consultants as well as the impact on existing resource.
 - d. How the council are managing new regulations around planning fees and charges.
 - e. Planning enforcement resources.
 - f. The council's reserves risk and policy including significant financial risks and key income streams.
 - g. Details on the borrowing portfolio and the expected borrowing interest rate increases.
5. General information was also shared with the Task Group members but was not discussed at depth during the meetings:
 - a. Copy of a housing options report recently circulated to the Senior Leadership Team.
 - b. Advice from the Monitoring Officer regarding Overview and Scrutiny's involvement in the organisations structure.

Consultation

6. 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	<p>Priority is given to exploring options to develop revenue raising assets, for example, industrial units at the Ninn Lane site subject to satisfactory business modelling.</p>	<p>It was suggested that the Council should explore opportunities to develop sites for industrial units (similar to current stock) as these are in demand and perform well in the current portfolio. The viability of the Ninn Lane site should also be explored.</p>	<p>Noted: A commercial approach is embedded across the organisation and new opportunities to develop income flows are actively encouraged and acted upon.</p> <p>With regard to Ninn Lane, the possible development into industrial units was a risk mitigation strategy to the original purchase. The refuse fleet will not be using this facility and therefore options will be explored for possible industrial development.</p>
II	<p>The temporary accommodation budget may now be insufficient to meeting further increased demand in homelessness representations. It is proposed that the budget is increased by £445,000 to reflect the increased demand and forecasting.</p> <p>The Task Group also supports the exploring of opportunities to acquire new sites/buildings for temporary accommodation in order to reduce the long-term impact on the general fund revenue costs.</p>	<p>Since the draft budget was set in October 2023, there has been a continued upwards trend in Homeless representations which are becoming more in line with the assumptions reported by the Housing Team. The original budget was set on an average number of 178 households, but it was felt that this should be more in line with the middle of the three scenarios within the homelessness paper which suggested 210 households.</p> <p>To adjust the draft budget from 178 to 220 households (allowing for a slight further increase in growth), Members proposed that the 2024/25 budget should be increased by £445,000 as per the paper presented. It also supports further exploration of sites that can be acquired and used as temporary accommodation to actively manage the homelessness pressure.</p>	<p>Recommendation to Cabinet – Support Growth:- Cabinet will be well aware of the ongoing pressures being faced by this service which have been well reported. Following a presentation by the Housing Service Improvement Manager to Management Team, and which was provided to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Budget task Group, the revised projections for homeless representations is higher than forecast in the Draft Budget. Management Team support this increase in budget to mitigate further anticipated pressures in 2024/25 and this has been added to the final budget and ask Cabinet to support this growth.</p> <p>The Housing Team are actively purchasing on street properties and exploring larger opportunities as they arise for Temporary Accommodation. When considering it is necessary for the TA to be in the right location to enable users easy access public services.</p>

Agenda Item No. 6

III	The Chief Executive undertake a further review of the senior management structure during 2024/25 with the objective of making further financial savings.	In line with advice received from the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, the Task Group propose that a further review of the senior management structure could assist with making the council further financial savings.	Accept: The Management Team are actively reviewing services in response to the need to deliver the savings strategy which would inform any changes to the senior management structure.
IV	The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) showing data for planning applications is broken down to show the difference between cases currently held up by Stodmarsh, and those not.	Stodmarsh continues to have a huge impact on major applications since 2019. In particular, Members felt it was important for KPI's to show a difference between backlog applications that were and were not affected by issues at Stodmarsh.	Accept: The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development has been reviewing the KPI's and Service PI's with the Assistant Director for Planning and Development. The number of planning live cases is currently reported as one of our KPIs. For the last quarter, the number of Stodmarsh impacted cases was reported separately and this will continue whilst Stodmarsh has a bearing of the figures. The KPIs will also be reviewed as part of the Corporate Plan development and we can ensure consideration is given to how these measures are best presented.
V	Swift action is undertaken by the Assistant Director of Planning and Development to make an appeal to central Government over the decision not to increase (double) retrospective planning fees, and lobby them to do so.	It was highlighted that the Government have chosen not to explore increasing fees for retrospective planning applications. Members felt that planning, in conjunction with other authorities, should lobby government and propose doubling planning fees for retrospective applications to act as a deterrent. Members present at the meeting indicated they would support such a proposal, and it is likely that all members within the Council would feel the same.	Noted: Management Team feel the same as members on this point which would help deter development without appropriate consent. The Assistant Director of Planning and Development write to Government on behalf of the Council if agree by Cabinet and provide an update on any responses accordingly.
VI	The income loss assumed as a result of the proposed increase to garden waste collection fees be revised and consider increasing this budget by £60,000.	When reviewing the council's key income streams, under refuse and recycling, Members noted there was an assumed loss of 1000 customers in response to the proposed increase to waste collection fees. Members felt that this assumption was set too high and suggested that the figure was reviewed.	Recommendation to Cabinet – Not to increase budget:- The budget proposes that the charge for garden was increase from £45 to £60 per annum. When the fees has previously increased by £2.50, the Council usually loses 300 - 400 customers at renewal, and then attracts new customers throughout the year. Given the considerable increase and the current economic conditions, there is a likelihood of losing approximately 1,000 customers.

			The risk assessment would not advise increasing the budget at this time.
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7. The Task Group also recommended to the wider Overview and Scrutiny Committee that;

VII	A report is brought forward to the Full O&S Committee in 2024/25 to provide an update on the results of the condition survey of the Councils Commercial Portfolio, and how this will inform future repairs and maintenance programmes and disposal strategy.	Members were confident that there was no risk at this stage in time for the upcoming budget. However, future costs needed to be fully understood and following the completion of the corporate property portfolio stock condition surveys, the asset management plan including disposal strategies should be presented to the full Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	For information.
VIII	Representatives from Arlingclose are invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the council's treasury management strategy.	Discussion took place regarding treasury management, including the council's borrowing levels and debt management strategies. It was agreed that a presentation from Arlingclose would aid Member's understanding of this area and therefore would be added as a topic to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme.	For information.

Wrap Up

8. 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

9. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group have considered the 2024/25 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

10. Abi Sheppard, Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager
 abi.sheppard@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330394

Lee Foreman, Service Lead Finance
Lee.foreman@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330509

Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Group – 11th December 2023

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Chilton, Ledger, Michael.

Also in Attendance:

Cllrs. Betty, Harman, Ovenden, Walder, Wright.

Also Present:

Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Corporate Director of Housing, Customer, Technology and Finance, Service Lead Finance, Senior Accountant, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation, Head of Policy and Performance, Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager, Member Services Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, there was an 'All Councillor Briefing on corporate Finance'.

1 Minutes of the Last Meeting

- 1.1 The Task Group agreed that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Meeting on the 12th January 2023 were an accurate record.

2 Draft Budget Report 2024/25

- 2.1 The Draft Budget report was introduced, this had been presented to Cabinet on 30 November 2023 and included a summary, budget pages (including service specific budget pages), income, risks and the HRA account. Members were invited to identify any areas they felt required extra detail and/or clarification at subsequent meetings, these were:

- Planning Enforcement was raised as an area that took up considerable Councillor time, further detail on the level of enforcement activity within the Borough and the resourcing available to this activity was requested.
- Members noted the turnaround time of small householder applications and felt that these should be dealt with promptly. There was an issue with a backlog of applications, this coupled with the change in the time in which applications should be determined and Stodmarsh meant that there were risks that needed to be looked at.

- Understanding and ensuring that the work on the Local Plan to 2041 would be resourced accordingly. In particular the staffing requirements, and how each site would be assessed. There were concerns raised that there would be significant fees in relation to consultants – this may be appropriate but Members felt that a ‘deep dive’ into this would be appropriate.
- There were a number of areas that were discussed as part of the medium term financial plan, during which assumptions were made about those areas, including parking charges, the monitoring centre, economic development and grounds maintenance – whilst all of those areas may not be fully covered it felt appropriate to have detail on the areas of risk and the assumptions being made. Members were advised that in respect of the function of the monitoring centre, a task group had been established to look at the functions of community safety and the conclusions from that would be put to Members – that would be a decision for the future, it was not a decision for this budget. The only item that had been actioned for this 24/25 budget was the increase in parking charges that had already been considered by both Cabinet and Council. All of the other items would be subject to working groups and it would be wrong to pre-empt that work.
- There was some discussion around the Council’s reserves policy and whether the current levels required adjusting. It was noted that the previous year had seen the reserves ‘dipped into’ and it was likely that the same would occur for the upcoming budget year. The resilience of the reserves was questioned, along with whether any had been earmarked for future plans.
- It was questioned whether a stock review of commercial units had been done or would be done to explore where the revenue was being generated. Garages and light commercial industrial units were performing well and it was deemed prudent to consider how to maximize income of the Council’s commercial holdings.
- Prior to the meeting a Member of the Task Group sent a number of questions to the Service Lead Finance, including requesting details on contingency, maintenance requirements and the key assumptions regarding various income streams. In respect of the move to International House – it was questioned whether there would be budget pressures and assurances were sought that there would be uninterrupted levels of service. The questions would be answered in a paper to the Task Group for review.
- A Member raised the issuing of IT equipment for Councillors and whether that required reassessing. A number of Councillors had returned their own devices and opted to use their own – should more Councillors wish to do this, this would be accommodated.
- There was some discussion regarding further potential savings at senior management level and whether there were other options available by a further restructure taking place. Whilst this was not a matter for the Task Group to consider during the scrutiny of the budget, the appropriate method for considering such matters would be reported back following legal advice.

- A risk assessment was included as part of the budget report and it was felt that it would be worthwhile spending time reviewing this, with Members views being added to those risks. As part of this homelessness was also raised, and a paper would be presented to the Task Group to ascertain whether this needed more work.

2.2 The Chair of this Meeting of the Task Group welcomed the large number of areas that had been suggested by the Task Group for review as part of the budget scrutiny process. He advised that he, along with the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, would spend time with Officers to rationalise the areas for review.

Recommendations

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

Meeting 1 – Wednesday 10 January 2024	
<u>Service</u>	<u>Topics</u>
General for information Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response to Cllr Michael questions • Homelessness – Copy of report presented to SLT to determine if further review needed. • Advice from Monitoring Officer on O&S involvement in Structure
Environment, Property and Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate property, asset condition and asset maintenance programme. • Commercial property portfolio risk

Meeting 2 – Monday 15 January 2024	
<u>Service</u>	<u>Topics</u>
Planning and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the Local Plan, use of consultants, and impact on existing resource. • Planning fees and charges, how are we managing new regulations and ensuring we hit appropriate time scales?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning enforcement resources
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Meeting 3 – Tuesday 16 January 2024	
<u>Service</u>	<u>Topics</u>
Risks & Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reserves, how much, purpose, risk and policy • Significant financial risks, including key income streams,(risk assessment approach)
Wrap Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of findings and discussion over draft recommendations.

Councillor Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

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Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Group – 10 January 2024

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Chilton, Ledger, Michael.

Also in Attendance:

Cllrs. Betty, Hicks

Also Present:

Deputy Chief Executive; Corporate Director of Place, Space and Leisure; Corporate Director of Housing, Customer, Technology and Finance; Assistant Director of Housing; Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation; Aspire and Parks Portfolio Operations Manager; Commercial Projects and Recreation Manager; Commercial Portfolio Operations Manager; Service Lead Finance; Senior Accountant; Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager; Member Services Officer.

1. Election of Chair

1.1 Cllr Bell was elected to chair this meeting.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

2.1 The Task Group agreed that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group Meeting on the 11 December 2023 were an accurate record.

3. Environment, Property and Recreation

3.1 The Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation gave a presentation, outlining the position of current corporate property projects, the individual stock condition surveys in progress and the aspiration to move to a 70/30 split for planned and reactive works. The diverse stock consisted of 393 non-residential properties, plus approximately 1500 garages, with a total value around £134m and a 2022/23 income of £4.3m. There was an annual performance report presented to Cabinet each October, and ERIAC briefings had been conducted last autumn. The Asset Management Strategy, including a Disposal Strategy, was under review in 2024. Potential risks were highlighted, risk removal and mitigation measures were mentioned and next steps were listed. She proposed to present a report to O & S Budget Scrutiny in late 2024 with detailed

results and decisions being made on the portfolio; this was agreed by the Chair.

3.2 The Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation was thanked for a comprehensive presentation and the item was opened up for questions.

- A Member asked for the costs per kilowatt hour of electricity assumed within the budget. The contract with the provider was under renewal and the Commercial Portfolio Operations Manager agreed to feed back the costs to the Task Group Members.
- A Member commented that it was wise to concentrate efforts on projects that could or should be funded externally, to protect the budget.
- In response to a question, the Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation confirmed that the greatest unknown risk was the outcome of the stock condition surveys, where sensible individual decisions might need to be discussed and taken jointly, to ensure revenue was secured. The Service Lead Finance confirmed that, unless there were immediate Health and Safety works needed, expenditure would be from capital funds.
- There had been promising interest shown in the re-letting of the vacant units at Elwick Place.
- It was confirmed that industrial units were currently proving to offer the most robust income return, with a waiting list for availability and simplicity of management.
- In response to a comment regarding the redevelopment of garage sites, it was underlined that all options for these were considered cross-departmentally before a final decision as to future use was made.
- The Chair questioned data regarding levels of debt and debt servicing, as displayed on a government website. It was known that the data gathered to create the charts was imperfect, in that it included the historic HRA debt, which was not pertinent to the General Fund viability. The Service Lead Finance agreed to share his own calculations with the Task Group at the final meeting, for consideration before any decision to recommend a 'deep dive' to O & S Committee.
- The Service Lead Finance offered to bring information on current corporate income levels, reserve funding and any apparent risks to the operational budget, to the final O & S TG meeting; this was welcomed.

4. General For Information Items

4.1 A Member thanked the Service Lead Finance for the comprehensive response to a number of budgetary questions he had presented.

4.2 The Task Group agreed to the recommendation in the additional note to the Homelessness report, to propose to increase the budget to £445K, due to the

continued upward trend in incidences of homelessness.

- A number of suggestions for potential sites for development into temporary accommodation were received from Members, which the Assistant Director of Housing agreed to review.
- The Assistant Director of Housing confirmed that the purchase of eight additional RSAP properties was included in the budget; the transaction was nearing completion.
- Discussions took place regarding the preferred location of schemes for the homeless. A balance was needed that took into account the potential impact on the wider community with the level of individual case support required and the available facilities.
- It was confirmed that sometimes placements had to be made outside of the borough, in emergency situations.

4.3 Senior Management review suggestion – the letter from the Monitoring Officer was noted, and the suggestion that a Task Group recommendation for a review should be undertaken by the Chief Executive was agreed, for 2025/26 budgetary consideration.

Recommendations

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

Meeting 2 – Monday 15 January 2024	
<u>Service</u>	<u>Topics</u>
Planning and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing the Local Plan, use of consultants, and impact on existing resource. • Planning fees and charges, how are we managing new regulations and ensuring we hit appropriate time scales? • Planning enforcement resources

Meeting 3 – Tuesday 16 January 2024	
<u>Service</u>	<u>Topics</u>

Risks & Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reserves, how much, purpose, risk and policy• Significant financial risks, including key income streams,(risk assessment approach)
Wrap Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation of findings and discussion over draft recommendations.

Councillor Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

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Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Group – 15th January 2024

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Ledger, Michael.

Apologies:

Cllrs Chilton, Ovenden

Also in Attendance:

Cllr Harman.

Also Present:

Corporate Director of Place, Space and Leisure

Corporate Director of Housing, Customer, Technology and Finance

Assistant Director Planning and Development

Head of Policy and Performance

Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager

Service Lead Finance

Senior Accountant

Member Services Officer.

1 Draft recommendations from previous meeting

1.1 The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager outlined the draft recommendations following the previous meeting and invited feedback from the committee.

- The Corporate Director of Place, Space and Leisure noted that Recommendation 1 should refer to the Council's commercial property assets.
- Cllr Bartlett requested an additional sentence to Recommendation 3 to include that the task group recommends to Cabinet that opportunities be explored to acquire new capital assets, in order to reduce the long-term impact on the general fund.

2 Planning Presentation

2.1 The Assistant Director Planning and Development gave a comprehensive presentation to the Committee which covered the following points and areas:

- Local Plan – budget strategy and review
- Evidence prepared in-house and Specialist evidence requirements 24/25

(estimated costs)

- Local Plan – conclusion
- Budget strategy – hitting application handling targets
- Application fee increases from 6/12/2023 and Projected income and caseload
- Trends in major applications – Stodmarsh
- Other income sources for 25/25 and Planning Guarantee changes
- Managing Performance Risk in service
- Enforcement – budget strategy and moving forwards

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

- There was some discussion around whether an increase to the fees might provide an opportunity to recuperate some monies back into the reserves. The Assistant Director Planning and Development spoke about the indirect relationship between the Local Plan encouraging more planning applications, which in turn resulted in more fees being paid. The Senior Accountant added that the budget for next year had stayed the same, and any major applications that came through would assist in exceeding that budget. Those monies could then be transferred back into reserves. The aim was to reduce the £1.2 million that had been earmarked, with an over achievement on planning income. The option to implement a reserve contribution (as was already in place with the Housing repairs and maintenance fund) was something for ABC to consider going forward.
- In response to a question querying whether sufficient funds had been set aside for external consultants, the Assistant Director Planning and Development explained that a reasonable and robust assessment of costs based on past experiences had been undertaken and the department now had a better understanding as to the scope of the work that was required when using external specialists.
- A Member asked whether any more funding was needed for when further updates to the ARCUS system were applied. The next phase of improvements for the back office and the outward facing elements of ARCUS would complement the enhancements to the planning pages on the website that were underway but that these improvements, when taken together, would create additional efficiency and capacity within the service and thus potentially be cost-saving. The intention was to enable people to use the website on a 24/7 basis and for it to answer the vast majority of the questions that they might have, which in turn would take some pressure off of the business support team.
- There was some discussion regarding the work undertaken by the Land Mapping Commission (LMC), and the role that work would play when shaping the new Local Plan, to accommodate those additional demands, including any financial implications. It was agreed that the LMC had provided valuable concepts for the Council, which would result in a less traditional style Local Plan. The government had signaled that having national development management policies was the direction of movement they preferred and this

could result in some topic-based policies contained within the current Local Plan being superseded.

- The increase to pre-application fees was highlighted, with a suggestion that this figure could be justifiably increased again. The fees had previously risen only 12 months prior, and legislation stated that pre application advice should only ever be cost recovery. It was felt that another increase too soon could deter people from using the service, especially since it was not mandatory. The Chairman considered whether a recommendation to look at the options for potentially increasing those charges and moving towards cost recovery earlier would be useful. The Assistant Director Planning and Development advised that ABC were in line with neighbouring Local Authorities on the current scale of the fees. In addition, the quality of service would need to justify the higher price, and having only just restarted the non-majors pre-application advice, he thought they would be best placed to wait and consider this in the future.
- An observation was made on the graph showing a dip in the movement of major applications owing to Stodmarsh. A Member noted that a number of other contributory factors should be considered including Covid, major wars and the cost of living crisis.
- The Spatial Planning team was dedicated to taking the Local Plan forward, and they liaised with colleagues across the Council, and had formed a cross service Officer Working group. It was felt that they were sufficiently resourced to undertake the work without having to draw on people whose focus should be elsewhere in the main, and the salaries and overheads had already been included in the budget.
- In response to a question asking were there regular weekly reports to flag when an application was approaching its deadline, it was confirmed that a dashboard gave a two-week warning before that period expired and a one-week warning as well.
- Managers in Planning had been working to identify the 'hard to shift' cases that had got stuck in the system and the backlog was now being cleared. Approximately half of the live cases outside of the statutory determination dates were those affected by Stodmarsh. A Member suggested a recommendation that the backlog be separated out for clearer analysis.
- The KPI's were currently being reviewed to ensure the correct information was being captured, and over the coming year, a broader scope and range of performance indicators for the service were anticipated.
- The Portfolio Holder spoke to assure the Task Group that the LMC work would be incorporated into the Local Plan, and communication and public engagement would play a pivotal part. She went onto talk about KPI's and the importance of understanding the details of what was happening on a day-by-day basis, to ensure clarity and efficient management of the planning process.
- A Member asked whether Councillors and the Council should be lobbying the

government to increase fees for retrospective applications. The Chairman agreed and asked for renewed efforts to lobby and asked the Assistant Director Planning and Development to formulate a document to request signatures on the notion that ABC should double fees on retrospective planning applications. He added this as a Task Group recommendation.

- In response to a question regarding the timescale for validation of applications, it was confirmed that this began when the application was validated. Invalid applications were not included in the timeframe until they were deemed valid.
- There was some discussion around planning enforcement and statutory requirements. The Assistant Director Planning and Development explained that ABC and KCC were the main authoritative bodies for enforcing planning, and held the authority to take appropriate enforcement action. Depending on the nature of the breach and the seriousness of the issue involved, ABC would usually in most cases initially seek the submission of a planning application, but there were occasions where the Council had taken injunctive action in the courts to prevent a breach occurring. He added that it was not a statutory duty, so the Council was not obliged to take enforcement action. Furthermore, in relation to consultation for the Local Enforcement Plan, Parish Councils were considered key stakeholders, both in terms of identifying when breaches occur, and acting on behalf and being part of the communications to their residents as well. The Chairman asked whether this subject could be reflected upon when writing up the recommendations. The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager added that corporate enforcement review already featured on the O&S work program for the wider committee, expected around late springtime. A cross cutting working group would be reviewing how various enforcement officers could work more effectively across different services within the Council.

Councillor Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

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Ashford Borough Council: Notes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Group – 16th January 2024

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group);

Cllrs. Bartlett, Chilton, Ledger, Michael.

Also in Attendance:

Cllr. Shilton

Also Present:

Deputy Chief Executive; Service Lead Finance; Senior Accountant; Head of Policy and Performance; Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager; Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer

1. Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Cllr Bartlett declared that he lived next door to the International Border Facility and that he was a Member of KCC.

2. Risks and Income

- 2.1 The Senior Accountant introduced this item and explained that the paper updated financial and service risks identified when drafting the budget for 2024/25, together with a list of the Council's key income streams. She explained that as new data and information became available the risks presented within the draft budget had been revised to reflect these updates. The Senior Accountant ran through the main Budget Components and the following questions/points were raised:

- Ashford Port Health Authority – there was a question about the proposed reduction in staff numbers for traffic monitoring and new shift patterns, and the potential effect this would have on the Council's operations. It was suggested that this issue was discussed further at a Joint Transportation Board meeting. The Deputy Chief Executive said that this could also be raised at the Ashford Strategic Delivery Board. He acknowledged that there were several unknown factors at present, although he considered that the project was likely to go live, and should be considered as a risk. A Member asked about charging fees for haulage and import of goods into the UK and asked how fees were collected. The Service Lead Finance advised that there was a system in place to ensure that income was collected in advance, although larger haulers might be permitted to have a tab arrangement. There was a question about the risk of additional costs and the Service Lead

Finance advised that this related to charges for the Council's management time. There was another question about the potential for expansion and the Deputy Chief Executive advised that there were other income streams that could be brought on line, such as assistance with exporting. It was agreed that the risks would be tolerated at present, with support and underwriting from Government.

- Government Spending Review – the Deputy Chief Executive advised that this was a longer term risk and it would be prudent to tolerate the risk at present but keep an eye on the issue. The provisional settlement this year had been positive but was not as much as it had been in previous years. In response to a question, the Senior Accountant advised that some figures had been included in the Draft Budget and any subsequent figures received on Government spending would be included in the Final Budget.
- Pressure on the 23/24 Budget – a question was asked about the increase in the homelessness budget of £445K. The Senior Accountant advised that this figure was not included in the Draft Budget but would be included in the Final Budget. Regarding high inflation in relation to waste collection, a Member asked whether the new contract would peg the cost of collection for a year. The Service Lead Finance said that indexation compensation was built into the contract to make sure that the operators were on a point of parity. Regarding Elwick Place, the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Council was still invested in making the site work in its current format, although it was also considering future options. He confirmed that rent holidays were part of normal commercial terms. It was agreed that these risks would be tolerated, although proactive work to treat could be taken on the homelessness front.
- Stodmarsh – the Deputy Chief Executive said that this issue presented some long term risks, as well as short term risks in terms of a lack of major sites coming forward. There was also a risk of higher appeal costs, and these factors were a real risk for the budget. He advised that a wetland solution was on hold at the moment, and that further guidance was awaited from Government. There was some discussion about how to deliver funding for the Stour River catchment, and it was agreed that this could be revisited in future. There was a question about how many completions the budget was based on. The Service Lead Finance advised that as part of the MTFP process, officers forecast completions for the next year and built the figure into the tax base. He confirmed that the current figure was around 1% and he envisaged this would continue for the foreseeable future. It was agreed that the risks would be tolerated.
- Planning fees – Members agreed that the Assistant Director of Planning and Development should make an appeal to central Government over the decision not to increase (double) retrospective planning fees, and lobby them to do so.
- Transformation, Digitalisation and Commercialisation – the Service Lead Finance confirmed that the Council was continuing with initiatives to expand and absorb future growth costs. It was agreed that the risks would be

tolerated.

- Increases in service income – it was agreed that the risks would be tolerated.
- Housing Revenue Account – the Service Lead Finance said that this was sustainable at present and the business case was robust. A Member pointed out that there could be significant changes in the pipeline regarding mould regulations and the need to react in a shorter timeframe. It was agreed the risks would be tolerated.
- Estimates of the level and timing of capital receipts – there was a discussion about the desirability of disposing of Council housing stock and Right To Buy sales, The Service Lead Finance proposed that the market condition on how receipts were received should be tolerated, but action could be taken on how those receipts were spent.
- Major Capital Projects – The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that these risks should be tolerated, with a close scrutiny of the finances before committing to major capital projects.
- Business Rates – the Service Lead Finance said that when the new baseline reset came into play, this would result in the loss of the benefit of growth since the previous reset of 2013/14. This was a large risk to the organization. The MRPF had taken a balanced view on this. At present this was an unknown factor and further confirmation was awaited from Government. It was agreed that the risks would be tolerated.
- Inflation, Interest Rates and Pay Award – the Service Lead Finance said that the rise in inflation did not make a big impact on the MTFP due to lag, and he was reluctant to change the budgets for next year as it was unlikely to produce any benefit. In response to a question he confirmed that bad debt had been factored into the budget. He considered that the Council Tax payment was quite resilient although he anticipated difficult times ahead due to the accumulated impacts of inflation on residents and businesses. He confirmed that dividends on strategic investments were higher than anticipated. In response to a question about pay awards for staff, the Service Lead Finance explained that officers progressed incrementally on the salary pay scales, and also received an annual pay award which was set across the board.
- KCC Financial Position – a Member advised that KCC had recently agreed to pay the £250K waste contribution but he considered that this chances of this continuing in future years were reducing.
- Key Income Streams – under refuse and recycling streams, Members noted an assumed loss of 1000 customers. A recommendation was agreed to challenge the figure.

3. Debt and Debt Management

3.1 The Service Lead Finance drew Members' attention to the Oflog Website, which provided information on the Core Spending Power Calculation. He explained that the Ashford figure had been revised to exclude the HRA. He also emphasized that the figure had no regard to complex factors behind debt so it should be viewed with that in mind. He then gave a presentation which covered:

- Capital Financing Requirement;
- Breakdown of CFR and MPR;
- Liability Benchmark;
- Borrowing;
- Impact of Economic Climate on General Fund Borrowing Costs;
- Interest Rate Data
- Inflation Rate Data

During the course of the presentation and number of questions/points were raised as follows:

- There were some questions about the liability benchmark graph and the Service Lead Finance explained the workings of the graph and advised that it was not completely up-to-date but provided general guideline. More information was required on some schemes, so future decisions would affect the graph.
- A Member asked about the value of assets held by the Council and whether this information was published. The Service Lead Finance advised that details were published in the Statement of Accounts, and individual valuations were also available.
- A Member noted that with regard to borrowing, the Council had not opted for PWLB rates. The Service Lead Finance said that advice had been sought at the time from Arlingclose and the Council had followed their advice. The Member considered that the Council had not followed an ideal strategy and he requested that Arlingclose be invited to a future meeting to discuss the treasury management strategy.
- Regarding the economic climate on General Fund borrowing costs, the Service Lead Finance said that the amount of interest currently being paid by the Council had increased enormously although the actual level of borrowing had not changed.
- A Member asked about whether more resources were needed for treasury management. The Service Lead Finance replied that he was not convinced that more resources in treasury management would change the overall outcome and he was content with the current resourcing levels.

4. Reserves

4.1 The Service Lead Finance introduced this item and drew attention to the key points within the report, and the following questions/points were raised:

- There was a question about the 15% minimum reserve figure and how that figure was achieved. The Service Lead Finance advised that this was for the next operational budget and excluded contributions to and from reserves.
- In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council had been successful in bidding for funding under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, and this money would be used towards International House.
- The Service Lead Finance said that the report noted changes to the way the Council held reserves. There were not sufficient reserves to cover ideal provision, so there was a need to be cautious on spending reserves.
- There was a question about cash flow. The Service Lead Finance said that there had been approximately £200K in the bank over the Christmas period. The cash balance was kept low to reduce the need to borrow at high rates.

5. Wrap Up

5.1 The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager introduced this item. She explained that she would prepare a findings report with recommendations and this report, together with the minutes of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group meetings, would be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13th February. The final report would go to Cabinet on 29th February and on to Full Council, date to be confirmed. Members discussed the final recommendations of the Task Group and agreed the following:

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group recommends to the Cabinet that:

- I. Priority is given to exploring options to develop revenue raising assets, for example, industrial units at the Ninn Lane site subject to satisfactory business modelling.
- II. The temporary accommodation budget may now be insufficient to meeting further increased demand in homelessness representations. It is proposed that the budget is increased by £445,000 to reflect the increased demand and forecasting.
- III. The Task Group also supports the exploring of opportunities to acquire new sites/buildings for temporary accommodation in order to reduce the long-term impact on the general fund revenue costs.

- IV. The Chief Executive undertake a further review of the senior management structure during 2024/25 with the objective of making further financial savings.
- V. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) showing data for planning applications is broken down to show the difference between cases currently held up by Stodmarsh, and those not.
- VI. Swift action is undertaken by the Assistant Director of Planning and Development to make an appeal to central Government over the decision not to increase (double) retrospective planning fees, and lobby them to do so.
- VII. The income loss assumed as a result of the proposed increase to garden waste collection fees be revised and consider increasing this budget by £60,000.

The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group recommends to the Committee that:

- VIII. A report is brought forward to the Full O&S Committee in 2024/25 to provide an update on the results of the condition survey of the Councils Commercial Portfolio, and how this will inform future repairs and maintenance programmes and disposal strategy.
- IX. Representatives from Arlingclose are invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the council's treasury management strategy.

Councillor Bell (Chair for this Meeting of the Task Group)
Overview & Scrutiny Task Group – Budget Scrutiny

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Agenda Item No: 7



Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Hybrid Working

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked:

1. Review the progress made with hybrid working
 2. Note the impacts that hybrid working has (or hasn't had) on performance
 3. Note that this approach will continue to develop as we learn from our experiences
-

Date of O&S meeting: 13 February 2024

Chair of O&S Committee: Cllr Bell

Relevant Portfolio(s): Cllr Nilsson

Summary: Members of the committee were interested in exploring how well the hybrid arrangements were working and in particular wanted to consider this in terms of performance. This report will aim to provide a review of these areas.

Exempt from Publication: **NO**

Background Papers:

Contact: Michelle.pecci@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330602

Report Title: Hybrid Working

Introduction and Background

1. Since the pandemic, and the major change in attitudes around more flexible forms of working, hybrid working in particular has created new employee expectations and desires. At Ashford we already had flexible working policies and the ability to work remotely but the pandemic, and the emerging picture that hybrid working was likely to be widely adopted across other organisations, meant that we needed to ensure we could respond effectively to the wider employment market remembering that it would not be for everyone, one size may not fit all, and some service delivery models may not fit hybrid working.
2. We reviewed our homeworking/remote working and flexible working policies in early 2021 so that as restrictions eased we were prepared and could make consistent decisions within a framework of guidance.
3. The **remote working policy** supports requests for the flexibility to work some contractual hours in a location other than the usual base. This policy provides ongoing flexibility for both the staff member and the organisation recognising that needs change and both sides benefit from a requirement to review the success of the arrangement.
4. The **flexible working policy** is a statutory route to be taken where both the individual and council need certainty about working hours or location and, as a result, becomes a contractual term. An individual can currently only make one flexible working request per year so it is less flexible in this respect (although this is due to increase to a maximum of two per year in April 2024 when the Flexible Working Bill comes into effect).

Hybrid working

5. For staff whose roles can accommodate a hybrid style of working ABC's current approach is to require staff to attend their workplace an average minimum of two days per week.
6. Our full-time 'normal' working patterns continue to be Monday to Friday, office hours. There are a few teams that have different patterns due to operational requirements- Aspire, Ashford Monitoring Centre, Civil Enforcement Officers, for example. Nationally there has been much interest in 'four-day week' trials across both the public and private sector. Our staff are able to request part-time hours over four days, but a four-day week is not something that Ashford is considering exploring as a standard working model therefore hybrid working patterns for full-time staff is the 'normal' Monday to Friday pattern.
7. There are a range of approaches to hybrid working across the council that reflects different service needs and customer needs. All of these arrangements

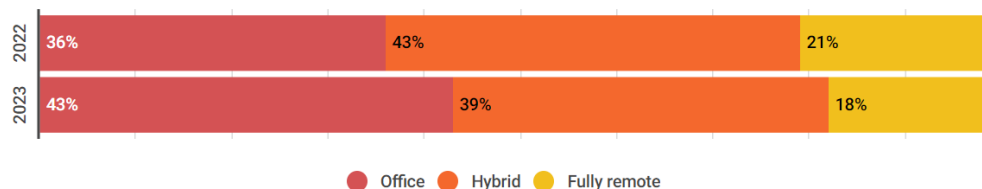
are agreed with the managers of the service and ensure that the service delivery is not compromised. For example:

- a. some teams tend to all be in on one specific day per week so that they can collaborate and have team meetings but vary where they work their other days across the week for the rest of the time.
 - b. other teams will have fixed days in the office to provide face-to-face cover for customers and colleagues, but also ensure they have at least one face-to-face team meeting every other month.
 - c. some staff arrange their week around the needs of their customers, having a mix of site visits, office time and homeworking time that accommodates the demand from their customers.
 - d. a number of teams are able to be flexible around the needs of the service and the demands of that week and fit their remote working days around whether they have face-to-face meetings scheduled.
 - e. a number of staff, either by choice or role do not work any of their time remotely/from home and work 100% of their time in the office.
 - f. a handful of staff work most of their time remotely, either through contractual flexible working arrangements or a more flexible remote working agreement.
8. The table below shows that our office attendance has increased over the past year, this is consistent with the wider world of work where fewer people worked 'fully remote' in 2023 than 2022 (chart 1 below Hays: [Tide Turns on Hybrid Working. October 2023 shows some comparison survey data](#)). There have been no reported difficulties in booking a desk, on occasions where more people come in than the department has allocated desks staff are able to use hot desks, or empty desks in other zones. This will continue to be the approach in International House but will be kept under review.

Month	Number of desks booked
October 2022	1202
November 2022	1761
October 2023	2095
November 2023	2086

Chart 1: Hays research on office/hybrid/fully remote working level

Office working vs hybrid working and fully remote working (2022-23)



Source: Hays UK and Ireland survey (Aug-Sep 2023) n=14,9

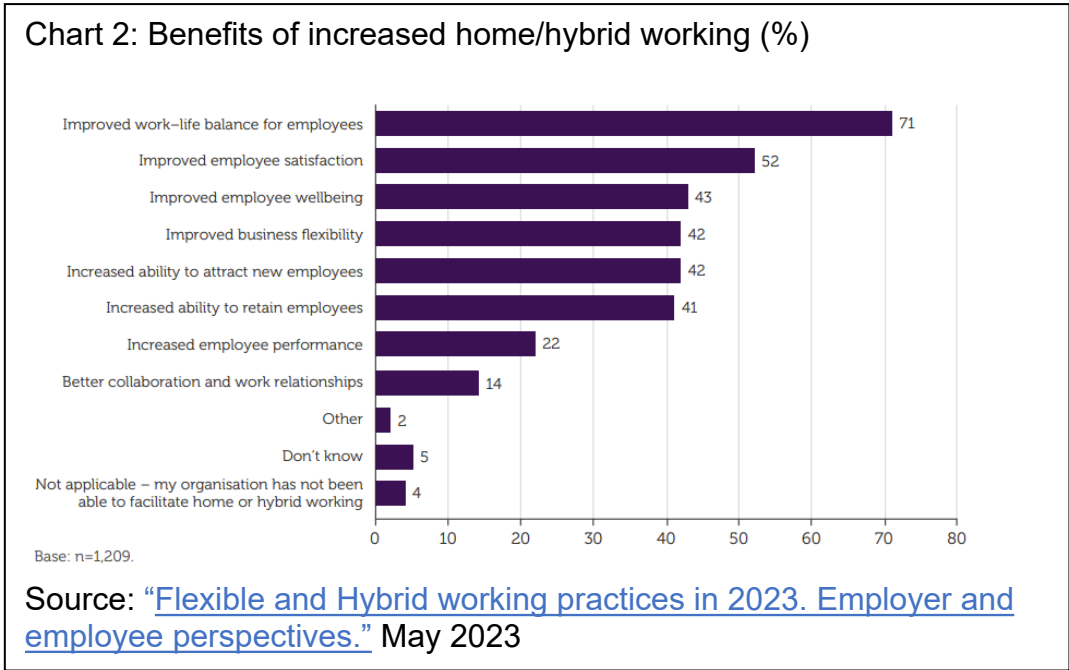
Source: Hays: [Tide Turns on Hybrid working](#). October 2023)

2023 Research

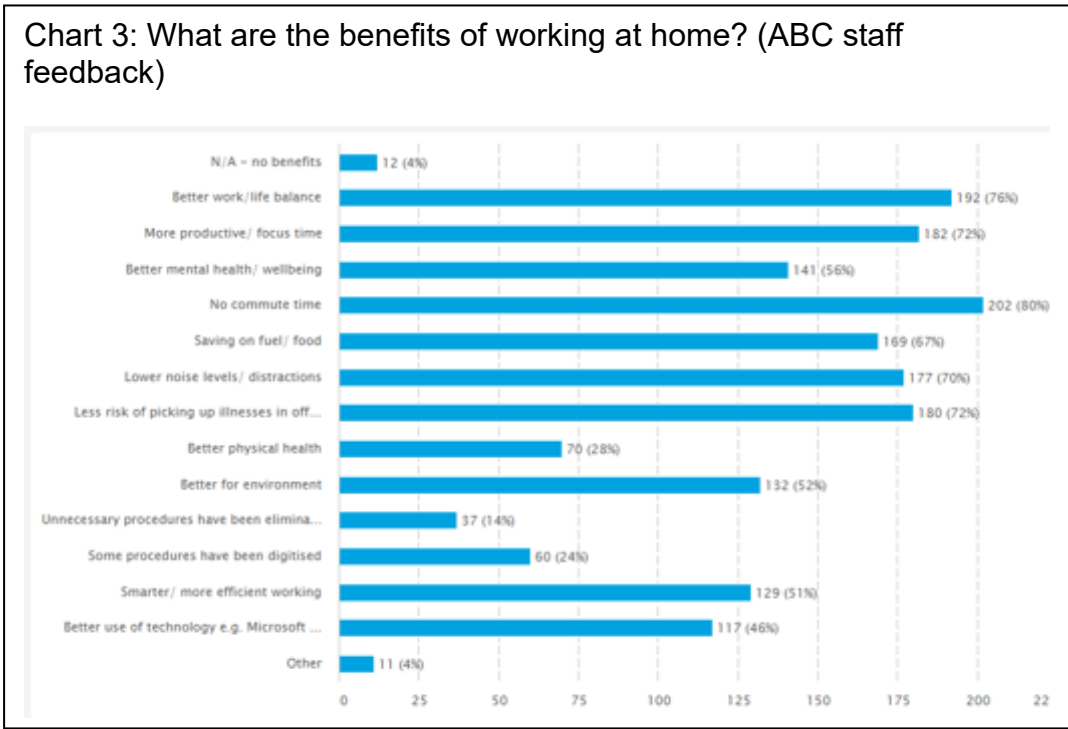
9. The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) conducted research, published in May 2023, into [“Flexible and Hybrid working practices in 2023. Employer and employee perspectives”](#). The survey, carried out by YouGov plc, was carried out online and the figures have been weighted by work sector, business size and region to ensure it is representative of UK workplaces.
10. This research showed that 83% of organisations have hybrid working in place, 45% with a formal policy (as we do). Over half (52%) require hybrid working employees to be in the workplace for a minimum number of days in the week/month, while 46% do not. Overall, employees are most likely to be required in the workplace for two (35%) or three (33%) days per week.

Benefits

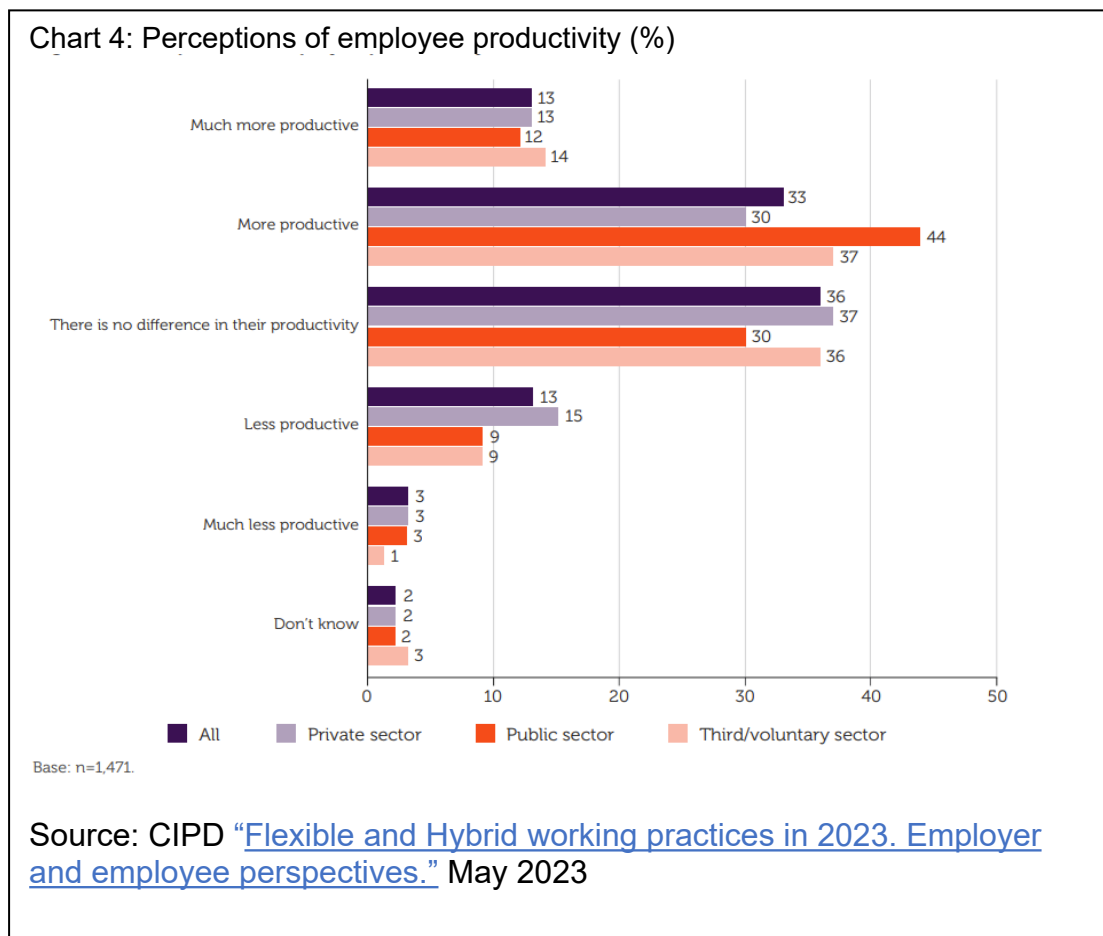
11. The CIPD research, reports that staff identify many benefits from working in a hybrid way, for both them and their employer (chart 2). These benefits include a better work–life balance, greater ability to focus with fewer distractions, more time for family and friends, saved commuting time and costs and higher levels of motivation, job satisfaction, improved productivity and reduced absence rates.
12. Hybrid working also provides other opportunities for organisations in terms of enabling employee wellbeing, supporting inclusion and diversity and reducing facilities costs.



13. The reported benefits for employees are consistent with the feedback we have had from our staff in the surveys we have conducted, including the most recent survey in November 2023 (chart 3).

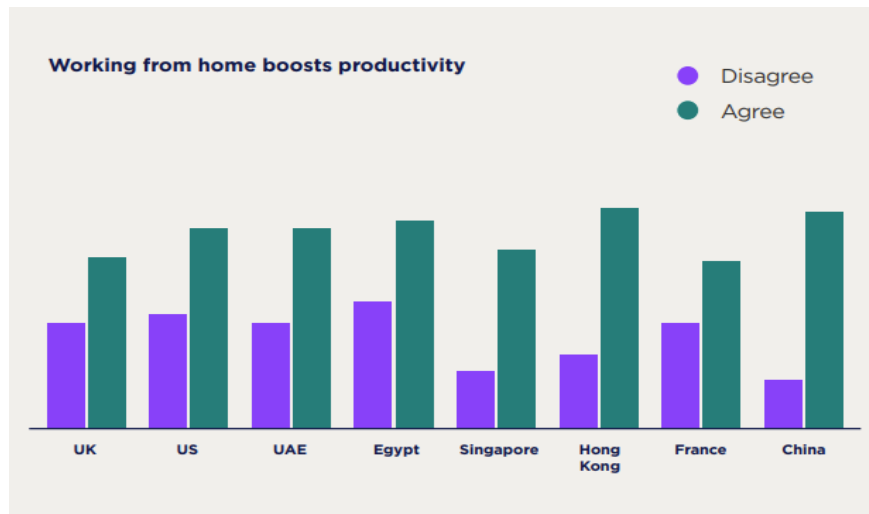


Productivity



14. The CIPD research (shown in chart 4) shows that two thirds (33%) of organisations say that more home/hybrid working has increased their organisation’s productivity/ efficiency; and [global research from Bupa \(2022\)](#) shows that 35% of UK business leaders say implementing hybrid working has boosted productivity in their organisations (chart 5).

Chart 5: Global research by Bupa on homeworking and productivity



Source: [Bupa Executive Wellbeing Index 2022](#)

Challenges

15. The CIPD research into some of the top issues faced as a result of the shift to increased home or hybrid working include:
 - getting people back into the office when needed (42%)
 - managers managing remote teams from a wellbeing and performance perspective (41%)
 - impact on collaboration and creativity (35%)
 - technology and/or connectivity difficulties (33%)
 - the impact on culture (26%)

16. The challenges identified in the research are similar to the feedback we had from our staff, with managers telling us the following:

Manager Benefits of hybrid working (top 3)	Manager Challenges of hybrid working (top 3)
Happy team	Harder to manage
Productivity/better focus	Need to be more organized
Ease of setting up meetings at short notice (via Teams)	Harder to collaborate

17. Managing remotely is very different to managing in a face-to-face environment as are the skills and behaviours managers need to take this difference into account. Whether they have a whole team working remotely or just a small number of the team working at home for a couple of days a week. Very early

during lockdown we recognised these challenges and produced a guide that helps to support managers in the communications they have with their team, how to build team morale, tackle difficult conversations, set objectives and support development, as well as ensure they are visible both in a face-to-face setting and virtually.

18. Alongside this guide is a programme of management development sessions that have been updated to take into account hybrid working. We will also be reviewing the managers' guide in response to the 2023 staff survey.
19. We also have a 'working remotely' guide for staff designed to assist them in understanding the basic requirements and tools available, as well as to emphasise the importance of looking after their wellbeing and especially that although they are physically distanced it is important to remain socially connected.
20. Whilst our staff survey results do not support this, in the past there has been some anecdotal feedback that staff started to feel that the 'family' environment we had pre-pandemic had diminished. We recognise that much of our prior successes in collaborative working, and having a strong 'family' culture, were as a result of having a social connection with the people you are working with. This isn't as easy to achieve without the ad hoc chats in the kitchen or by the copier so we have worked hard to reintroduce the face-to-face elements of our engagement programme (summer rounder's match, quiz nights etc.) and we are currently refreshing our programme to encompass more opportunities for face-to-face social connection.
21. Staff engagement is an area that we have been recognised as being strong in in the past, winning engagement excellence awards. Our staff engagement work has always helped us to stand out from the crowd compared to other organisations (including the private sector) and so we can have confidence that an inclusive and varied approach will be deployed to suit a wide range of staff in building and maintaining relationships that assist collaborative working in this new way of working.
22. Based on previous feedback 'office etiquette' designed to help minimise distractions when people work from the office have also been developed with input from staff, with the intention is that working from the office needs to be as convenient and productive as from home, with barriers minimised. Further important considerations for us are cyber security, data protection and health and safety. We have ensured a varied comms plan has been rolled out for each of these including staff training and awareness across all three areas.
23. Whilst managers are telling us it is harder to manage remote teams, both our managers and their staff are citing improved productivity as a benefit of remote working. There is data later in the report that highlights performance at ABC, but from a perception of productivity perspective the CIPD research is consistent with the views of our managers and staff (chart 4).

24. From a technology perspective our experience is not similar to the challenges identified by the CIPD (technology and/or connectivity difficulties (33%)). We were well advanced for remote working as the pandemic struck so our systems have worked well. Where staff have had connectivity difficulties due to their broadband we have been robust in requiring staff to work from the civic centre-even during the pandemic when we arranged 'socially distanced' workspaces.
25. We are remaining alert to the challenges and it is likely that our approach will need to change as we learn from our experiences, and learn from the feedback from staff, customers and members. We will also need to be flexible as technology, service design and customer demands/needs change to ensure service delivery is responsive, efficient and effective.
26. We had seen how learning and development, for example, had a seismic shift in approach where many programmes have gone online through virtual/zoom/Teams for their person to person sessions. Developments in the software now mean that traditional breakout groups are possible and this has broken down the barriers to remote learning. However many programmes now have a blended approach with a mixture of virtual seminars, independent eLearning and face-to-face. It is fair to say that the days of traditional learning are changed forever due to the advancements in hybrid technology.

Recruitment

27. As stated above our office attendance has increased (see paragraph 8), this is consistent with other employers yet despite this employers continue to offer hybrid working as a key feature during recruitment campaigns. This is a sign that there is still no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to how staff want to work and how flexible employers are willing to be.
28. Our experience when recruiting has been that candidates have an expectation of hybrid working. Recent campaigns where we have sought advice from recruitment specialists following unsuccessful ABC lead campaigns have resulted in feedback from the specialist companies recommending that we offer the ability to work in a hybrid way as this is what is offered by other employers and gives us a more choice of candidates due to the wider geographical pull for applicants.
29. We specifically asked questions of our new starters (joining since April 2022) to help us understand the recruitment and retention impacts on ABC of hybrid working. The chart below (chart 6), shows that 68% of staff recruited since April 2022 felt the ability to work in a hybrid way as an important factor in accepting the role with us, and told us that hybrid working is amongst the top factors in deciding to accept a job (chart 7).

Chart 6: Was your decision to accept the role with ABC based on having hybrid working in place?

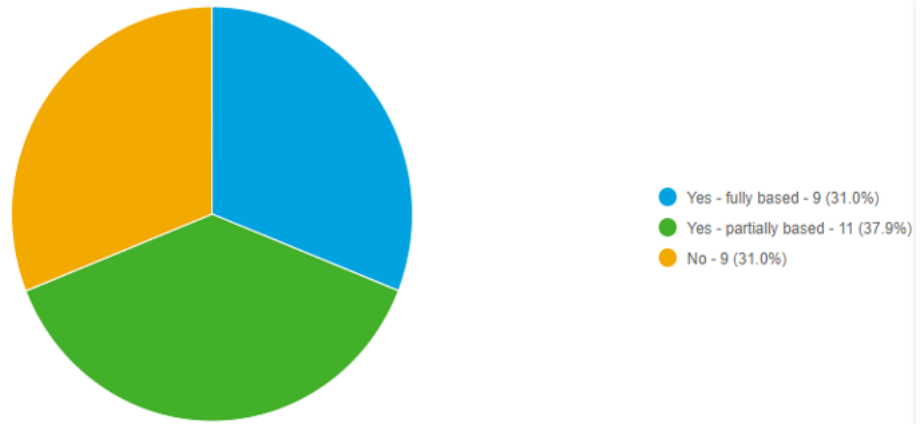
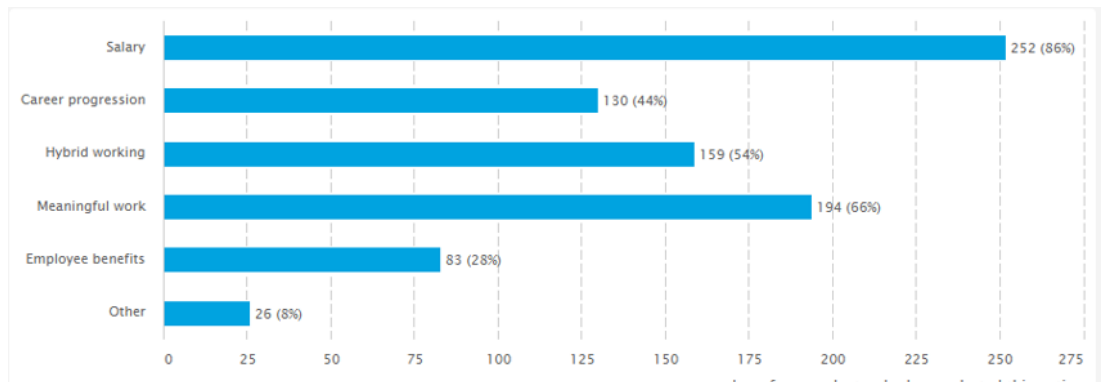


Chart 7: Which of these factors are important to you when accepting a job?



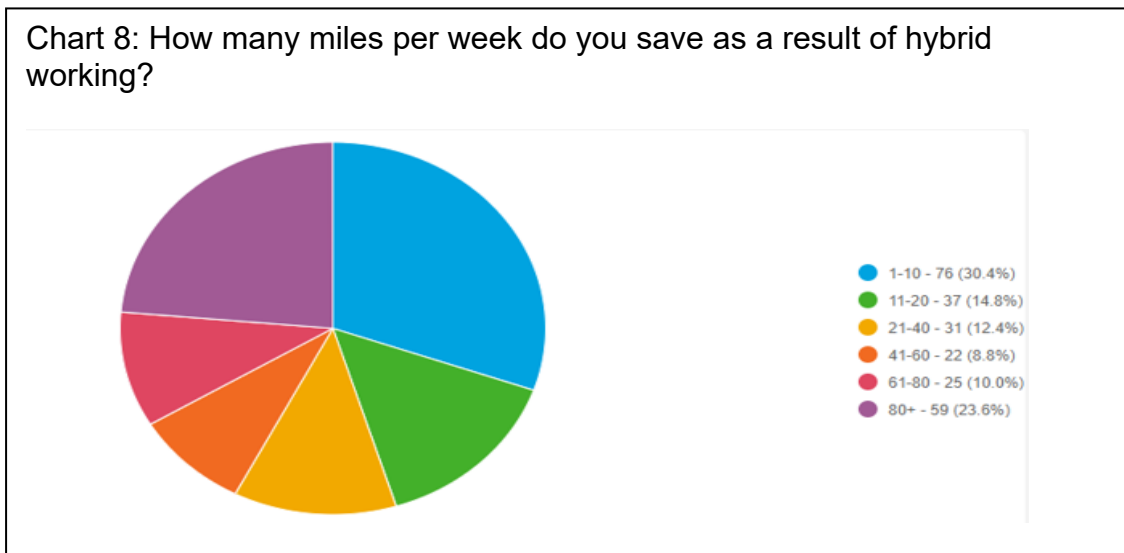
30. We have found that hybrid working has been high on the list of queries to our recruitment team when advertising roles, and for difficult to recruit roles like lawyers and planners being able to offer some hybrid working has proven to be essential in being able to attract applicants from a much wider geographical pool, with the majority of equivalent roles being advertised by others as hybrid too.
31. As we have developed our understanding of the complexities of hybrid working we have adjusted our approach to on-boarding. Initially all but essential on-boarding processes were carried out remotely however this approach is becoming much more 'blended' with a mix of dedicated face-to-face support as well as on-line and remote elements. A further review of the approach will be undertaken to ensure we welcome and train our new starters appropriately.
32. Similarly the support we provide for inexperienced and trainee staff has improved as we have reflected on our experience and increased our in office presence. As a result we have seen improved rates of satisfactory probation periods. In 2022

five probation periods were unfortunately unsuccessful, however in 2023 only two probation periods were unsuccessful (a 60% improvement), this is a positive outcome as it means people are 'getting up to speed' more quickly, and need less manager intervention time.

- 33. We provide a good range of opportunities for entry level roles within the organisation and currently have nine apprentices and three T Level placements

The impact on our carbon footprint

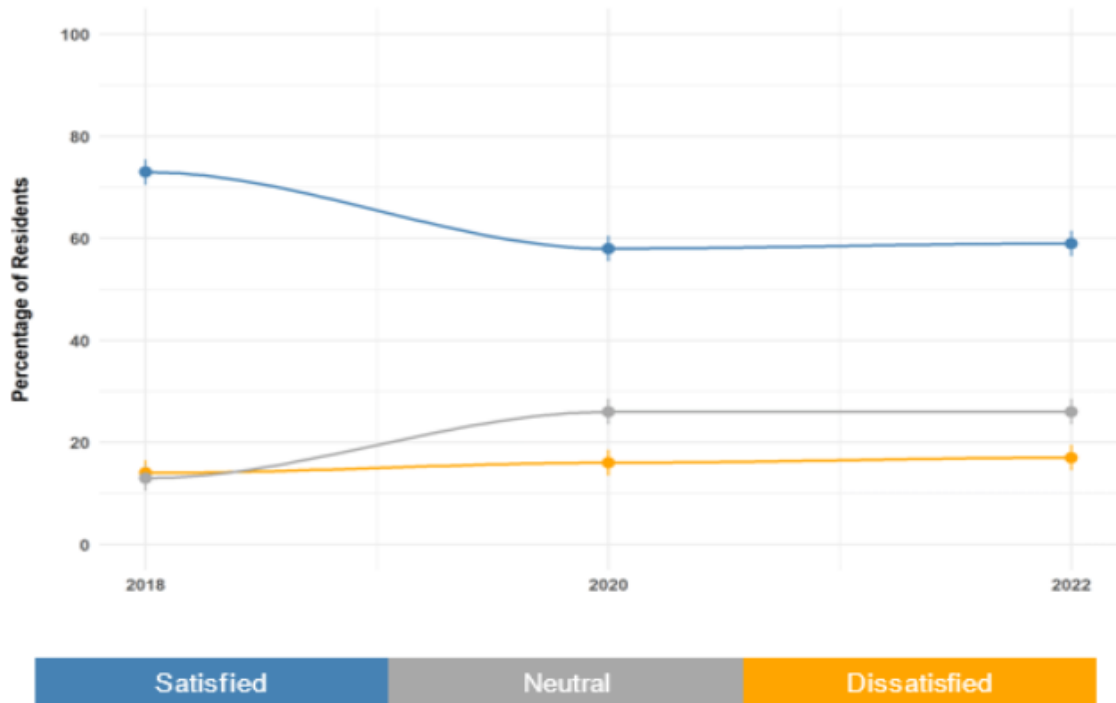
- 34. Fewer days working from the office has contributed to a reduction in our carbon footprint. We also asked staff how many miles per week they saved in commuting miles by working remotely, over the year this equated to approximately 370,000 commuting miles saved.



Performance

- 35. Members were interested in exploring how well the hybrid arrangements were working and in particular would like the Committee to consider this in terms of performance. The rest of this report will aim to provide a review of these areas.
- 36. One aspect of performance is **customer satisfaction**. A review of our complaints tracker has shown that there are no incidents of complaints related to staff working at home. The phone system allows a seamless direct dial to officers and the customer should therefore not know if the officer is in the civic centre or working elsewhere.
- 37. The 2022 residents survey asked “How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Ashford Borough Council runs its services?” the chart below shows the results for 2018, 2020 and 2022. Dissatisfaction levels have remained broadly the same during this period, and satisfaction levels have remained stable between the 2020 and 2022 surveys.

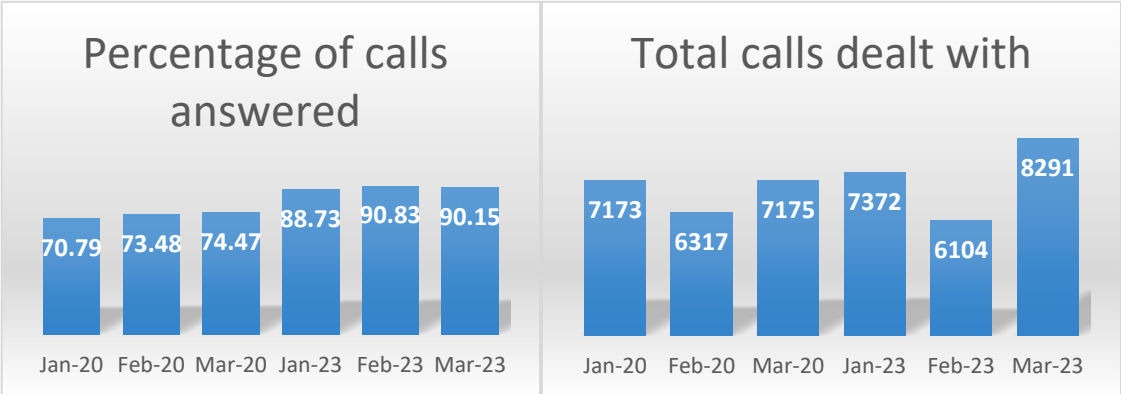
**“How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way
Ashford Borough Council runs its services?”**



38. More widely, quarterly **Corporate Performance Reports** are a well-established tool for members to review the council’s performance, and to ask questions. This appears to be working well, and as an example the O&S Committee have recently taken a deeper dive into whether the recycling KPIs ought to be reviewed.
39. The Corporate Performance Reports provide a higher level picture of performance, and Members will see that where KPIs have not been achieved it is as a result of key issues such as Stodmarsh, and a narrative is provided to explain the change in performance.
40. Within services other data is recorded to help with performance management and resource management. Better productivity is cited as a major benefit of homeworking, in some teams it can be difficult to measure this objectively by having tangible measures. For example the accountancy team will be measured on whether monitoring and reporting is complete and if budget pressures etc. are highlighted in a timely way, it will not necessarily measure how many or how long a piece of work took. However there are teams where it is easier to objectively see how performance was before widespread hybrid working compared to now.
41. Historically (pre-pandemic) the Customer service and Revenues and Benefits teams have had regular homeworking arrangements within the team and we

have always seen the homeworkers with higher productivity than equivalent office based staff.

- 42. There will always be a range of factors that contribute to the changes in productivity levels, and it can be difficult to pin-point exactly which elements have impacted and when, for example digitisation, different resourcing levels, demands and models, wider economic impacts etc.,
- 43. The following tables shows **Customer Service** data for the fourth quarter of 2019/20 (pre pandemic), compared to the fourth quarter of 2022/23.



- 44. It can be seen that the percentage of calls answered have increased from circa 73% to circa 90% across the comparison quarters despite the total numbers of contacts increasing by around 1,100 during the quarter. Some of this can be attributed to fewer face-to-face contacts, that take longer and have more down time;. but also based on pre-pandemic experience of homeworkers being more productive much of this will be a result of fewer distractions than being in the office.
- 45. The following data for **Environmental Health** shows the number of inspections carried out pre-pandemic, for the year up to the end of March 2020, and to date for this financial year. It shows the number of completed inspections are higher for the current year.

Inspections	Up to end 2019/2020	2022/2023 up to 17/11
Food - Non Routine (inc sampling)	52	98
Food - Routine	258	566
Food - Questionnaires	108	42
Licensing - Non Routine	2	32
Licensing - Routine	134	96
Licensing - Desktop Rated	43	4
Animal Inspections	24	40
H&S Inspections	18	0
PPC inspections	10	12
Total Inspections	649	890

46. Similarly for licencing the number of licence applications handled have increased.

Licensing Applications	Up to end 2019/2020	2022/2023 up to 17/11
Taxis (all)	474	582
Premises licences (inc new,transfer, DPS, variation, personal)	185	188
Temporary Event Notice	129	475
Gambling (inc Lotteries)	112	95
Animal Licensing	14	26
Other licensing	127	134
Skin piercing	30	50
Total	1071	1550

47. The data below for **Housing Services** shows a number of areas of comparison data across the same two periods. In the context that the demands on the housing team are higher now due to homelessness pressures, increased demand for housing, new regulations and emerging issues such as damp and mould the data shows that delivery has been broadly consistent despite the additional demands on staff and our housing stock.
48. It can be seen that the number of housing applications received increased significantly over these quarters; and whilst the number of applications we have accepted (i.e. added to the housing waiting list) reduced slightly during the quarter for 2022/23, this is not as a result of reduced productivity but is as a result of fewer eligible applicants that we need to support. However a much

higher level of initial applications have been reviewed and assessed by our housing colleagues.

Housing activity	Q4 2019/20	Q4 2022/23
1. Number of lettings	98	110
2. Housing Register Applications received	470	639
3. Applicants added to the Housing Register	350	333
4. Average number of days properties are 'void'	18	24
5. Number of ABC properties managed by ABC lettings	173	196
6. Private Sector Housing condition reports	265	440

49. The number of days an empty property is classified as 'void' increased during this period, there was a legacy disruption as a result of Covid that was still impacting this aspect in Q4 of 2022/23 this figure is much improved now although not back to pre-covid levels partly due to the additional pressures highlighted above.
50. The data below relating to **planning** applications show that the number of applications determined across the two comparison quarters is broadly consistent for major applications but has increased slightly for non-major applications.

	Q4 2019/20	Q4 2022/23
Major applications determined	8	9
Non-Major applications determined	290	321

51. Some of this increase in output may be attributed to the ability to work remotely and free of office distractions, but also historically this service relied heavily on consultants to supplement the resources and towards the end of 2022/23 most of this temporary support was ended, this will have a positive impact on performance as the impact of 'churn' in these roles inevitably lead to inefficient repeated getting 'up-to-speed' as cases where handed to new case officers.
52. Due to the timescale between all of these data sets, there will be a range of factors that may have contributed to the variance in the data, and it can be difficult to pin-point exactly which elements have impacted and when, for example digitisation, different resourcing levels and models, wider economic impacts etc., however this data does show that there has not been a reduction in performance as a result of widespread hybrid working.

Conclusions

53. Widespread remote working was originally foisted upon us as a result of the pandemic, we quickly rolled out systems, approaches and support frameworks for our organisation, this was in an environment where there was no rule book, or case studies to help guide us. We had to learn quickly and we continue to learn both from others and from our experiences.
54. Hybrid working is now a permanent feature of a modern workplace. If we are to remain relevant as an employer, we will need to ensure that we can meet candidates and existing employees' expectations; but equally ensure that managers are well equipped to manage issues that crop up as a result of remote working.
55. Whist managers are telling us it is harder to manage remote teams, both our managers and staff are citing improved productivity as a benefit of remote working, and the data shows that they continue to get the best out of their teams; however to get the best out of our teams we need to remain alert to emerging issues and listen to what our staff and managers are telling us and ensure that we respond in a positive way.
56. We have seen there are a range of benefits to both the staff member and the council of supporting hybrid working. We do however need to strike the balance and bear in mind that one size will not fit all and there is no single way to implement hybrid working. In some cases hybrid working cannot be accommodated, and in other cases its exact form is likely to vary and change and differ between services and this will require us all to be flexible and adaptable especially as technology, service design and customer demands/needs changes, and we will need to ensure service delivery is responsive, efficient and effective.

Contact and Email

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**CABINET
SCHEDULE OF KEY DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN**

The following Key Decisions will be taken by Ashford Borough Council’s Cabinet on the dates stated.

Ashford Borough Council’s Cabinet is made up of: - Councillors Noel Ovenden; Steve Campkin; Bill Barrett; Simon Betty; Linda Harman; Heather Hayward; Dawnie Nilsson; Kate Walder; and Liz Wright.

Copies of the reports and any other relevant documents that are submitted to the Cabinet in connection with a proposed decision will be available for inspection, five clear days before the decision at <https://ashford.moderngov.co.uk>

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
22nd February 2024					
Revenue Budget 2024/25	<i>To present the draft revenue budget for 2024/25 to the Cabinet for recommendation to Council.</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	24/2/23
Corporate Performance Report	<i>The report seeks to give Members and the Borough’s residents an overview of how the Council is performing. It seeks to do this in a transparent and easily-accessible manner, giving a key performance ‘snapshot’.</i>	Cllr Ovenden/ Hayward	Tom Swain	Open	24/2/23
Parks Foundation	<i>To present feedback from consultation and a roadmap of the charity registration process alongside a risk-benefit analysis and Equalities Impact Assessment of creating a Parks Foundation.</i>	Cllr Walder	James Laidlaw	Open	24/11/23

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
Tenterden Leisure Centre Procurement	<i>To set out the approach and framework of the TLC procurement so it is agreed before the tender documentation is published and we embark on the 12 month procurement exercise.</i>	Cllr Walder	Shaun Meyer	Open	30/11/23
Corporate Asbestos Management Policy, Procedure and Management Plan	<i>To seek approval for the revised Asbestos Management Policy, Procedure and Plan.</i>	Cllr Betty	Victoria Couper-Samways	Open	14/6/23
Renewal of LASER Contract for the Supply of Gas and Electricity	<i>To set out the different options open to the Council when it comes to the procurement of utilities and whether or not it should enter in to a new LASER agreement so that it can continue to procure gas and electricity through the LASER framework until 30 September 2028.</i>	Cllr Betty	Victoria Couper-Samways	Open	4/12/23
Roof Replacement, Thermal Upgrade and PV Installation at Ellingham Industrial Estate	<i>To seek additional funding approval for the inclusion of solar panels.</i>	Cllr Betty	Lee Craker	Open	3/1/24

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
21st March 2024					
Annual Pay Policy Statement (including Review for 2024/25)	<i>A review of the annual Pay Policy Statement.</i>	Cllr Nilsson	Michelle Pecci/ Joy Cross	Open	31/3/23
Annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results and Action Plans for Housing	<i>To provide the results of the annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey, benchmarks results in context of other social housing landlords and share a cross-service action plan for 2024 to address issues raised via the survey feedback.</i>	Cllr Barrett	Joanne Burns	Open	21/12/23
Armed Forces Policy	<i>To review and approve the new Armed Forces Policy.</i>	Cllr Nilsson	Joy Cross	Open	22/1/24
25th April 2024					
Parking Strategy		Cllr Campkin	Alison Oates	Open	1/12/22
Disabled Facility Grant Policy		Cllr Barrett	Julian Watts	Open	1/2/24
30th May 2024					

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
27th June 2024					
Corporate Plan Annual Report 2023/24	<i>To present the Annual Report 2023/24 highlighting performance against the Corporate Plan priorities.</i>	Cllr Ovenden/ Hayward	Tom Swain	Open	30/6/23
Final Outturn 2023/24	<i>Final budget outturn for previous financial year.</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	30/6/23
25th July 2024					
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	30/9/22
Revenues & Benefits Recommended Write-Offs Schedule	<i>Proposed formal write-off of debts</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Nic Stevens	Open (Exempt Appendix)	30/7/22
Brompton Development	<i>To update of the progress of the discussions with both Brompton and the Developer in bringing forward the proposed development including the setting up a of joint venture company.</i>	Cllr Betty	Paul McKenner	Open	28/7/22
Corporate Plan		Cllr Ovenden	Charlotte Hammersley/ Jennifer Shaw	Open	13/12/23

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
29th August 2024					
KEEP CLEAR FOR HOLIDAYS					
26th September 2024					
Corporate Performance Report	<i>The report seeks to give Members and the Borough's residents an overview of how the Council is performing. It seeks to do this in a transparent and easily-accessible manner, giving a key performance 'snapshot'.</i>	Cllr Hayward	Tom Swain	Open	2/10/23
Update on Levelling Up Funding and Newtown Works Development	<i>To update on the progress in drawing down the Levelling Up Funding, the works undertaken to date, the current programme for the development and the risks for the project.</i>	Cllr Betty	Andrew Osborne	Open	2/10/23
Allocations Policy		Cllr Barrett	Amanda Gill	Open	20/9/23
31st October 2024					
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report.</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	27/10/23

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
Council Tax Base 2025/26	<i>To present for approval the estimated 2025/26 Council tax base calculation for the Borough and each parished area, on which the major preceptors and local Parish Councils will base their requirements.</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Jo Stocks	Open	27/10/23
Medium Term Financial Plan	<i>To ask Cabinet to note the Medium Term Financial Plan ahead of this year's Budget process.</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	27/10/23
Annual Commercial Property Update - 2023/24	<i>To advise of the revenue performance of the Council's corporate property portfolio during the last financial period and to advise of proposals to increase profitability in the coming financial period.</i>	Cllr Betty	Eloise Duffy	Open	27/10/23
Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2024 - 2054 (including Financing and Affordable Homes Programme)	<i>To detail the financial position in the HRA and ask Members to agree Housing's priorities for the next year.</i>	Cllr Barrett	Jo Stocks/Mark James	Open (Exempt Appendix)	27/10/23
28th November 2024					
Corporate Performance Report	<i>To give Members and residents an overview of how the council is performing with a key performance 'snapshot'.</i>	Cllr Ovenden/ Hayward	Tom Swain	Open	1/12/23

Decision Item	Report Summary	Relevant Portfolio Holder	Report Author	Open or Exempt	Added to Schedule
Draft Budget 2025/26	<i>To present the preliminary draft service budget and outline MTFP for the purposes of subsequent formal scrutiny by the O&S Task Group and public consultation.</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	1/12/23
19th December 2024					
30th January 2025					
Revenues & Benefits Recommended Write-Offs Schedule	<i>Proposed formal write-off of debts</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Nic Stevens	Open (Exempt Appendix)	26/1/24
Financial Monitoring – Quarterly Report	<i>Quarterly budget monitoring report</i>	Cllr Ovenden	Lee Foreman	Open	26/1/24

If you wish to contact a Report Author by email, unless stated otherwise, the addresses are; first name.surname@ashford.gov.uk

1/2/24

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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
Update on Future System Upgrades with Arcus Global	September 2023	Planning and Development	The Committee expected to receive updates on the next phase of system upgrades with Arcus Global in the Planning and Development Service and Safety and Wellbeing Service.
Corporate Performance Report Q1	September 2023	Policy and Performance	Quarterly Performance Report in relation to Quarter 1. Information on what the Council has achieved through its decision making; key performance data and wider contextual information.
Residents Survey and Analysis	September 2023	Policy and Performance	The Committee requested a presentation regarding the latest results and analysis of the latest Residents Survey.
Consultation and Engagement Recommendations Update	September 2023	Policy and Performance	A report to update the Committee on the progress of recommendations made by the Consultation and Engagement Task Group.
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.
Water Supply in the Borough	November 2023	South East Water (external)	A presentation from South Easter Water to share latest updates on how they are improving resilience across their network and answer Member questions.
Community Safety Update	November 2023	Safety and Wellbeing	A presentation will be brought forward to provide an update on Community Safety and also the options moving forward, including savings for the Ashford Monitoring Centre. 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.
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 – 2 nd 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.
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.
Safeguarding Update	February 2024	Safety and Wellbeing	Annual update to the committee on the council’s work on safeguarding adults and children at risk.
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.
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.
Productivity, Staff Morale and Hybrid Working	February 2024	HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation	The Committee wished to look at workforce productivity, staff morale, remote working. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are our productivity levels the same as pre hybrid working? 2. How are council managers assured that staff are working to their optimum?

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.
Council Commercial Portfolio Update	Autumn 2024	Environment, Property, and Recreation	The Budget Scrutiny Task Group recommended that a report is brought forward to provide an update on the results of the condition survey of the Councils Commercial Portfolio, and how this will inform future repairs and maintenance programmes and disposal strategy.
Treasury Management	TBC	Finance, IT and Digital	The Budget Scrutiny Task Group requested that representatives from Arlingclose be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the council's treasury management strategy.
Enforcement Review	TBC	Safety and Wellbeing	The findings of the enforcement review will be brought forward to the Committee once the review has concluded.
Equalities , Diversity and Inclusion	TBC	Policy and Performance	An overview report of what has been done so far towards promoting equalities, diversity and inclusion at the council. The equalities objectives are currently being looked at as part of work on the Corporate Plan.