

**Agenda Item No:**

**Report To:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Cabinet



**Date of Meeting:** Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023  
Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023

**Report Title:** Performance Report, Quarter 1 2023/24

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

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

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

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

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

**Key Decision:** No

**Significantly Affected Wards:** None

**Recommendations:** **Overview and Scrutiny**  
**The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

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

**Policy Overview:** Performance measures reflect the objectives and priorities of The Corporate Plan 22-24.

This quarterly Performance Report acts as an opportunity to monitor the progress made by the council against the Corporate Plan.

<b>Financial Implications:</b>	None
<b>Legal Implications:</b>	None
<b>Equalities Impact Assessment:</b>	Not required as the report presents information on past council performance and does not recommend any change to council policy or new action.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment:</b>	Not required
<b>Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):</b>	Not required
<b>Sustainability Implications:</b>	None
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	None
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	NO
<b>Background Papers:</b>	Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024
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**Portfolio Holder’s Views:**

This Q1 performance report provides an opportunity to continue the monitoring and review of the council’s performance against its Corporate Plan. It highlights the progress made and constraints that are influencing our short and medium term performance.

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


# Report Title: Performance Report, Quarter 1 2023/24

## Introduction and Background







1. In 2019 we embarked on a comprehensive study to inform our next Corporate Plan, envisaging that this would be developed and adopted during 2020. As our work with stakeholders was coming to a conclusion the coronavirus pandemic forced the country into lockdown in March 2020. Our [Recovery Plan](#) was developed as an interim strategic document to focus our work towards enabling a timely recovery from the pandemic, supporting residents, communities and local business.
2. With the start of the 22/23 financial year the Recovery Plan was superseded by the [Corporate Plan 22-24](#). This Corporate Plan continues this journey and looks ahead, with renewed vigour, to realise the [Ashford Ambition](#) that was developed with a wide range of local stakeholders for a vibrant, caring and sustainable borough.
3. The Ashford Ambition is supported by three priority themes:
  - Green Pioneer – Where businesses, communities and the public and third sector have come together to become carbon neutral, respect the local environment and ecology, and embrace a more sustainable way of living.
  - Caring Ashford – A caring and supportive place to live, with rich heritage; thriving towns, villages and rural communities; great schools; high-quality housing; a plethora of cultural activities and events; and a strong sense of civic pride.
  - Targeted Growth – A place where productive, innovative, responsible town and rural business communities offer good quality work to an agile and skilled local workforce who have embraced a culture of lifelong learning.

These along with our underlying principles provide a framework that focuses our efforts on working towards our strategic objectives.
4. This report seeks to provide an overview of performance against the council's key performance indicators for Quarter 1 2023/24 period. The council's performance framework captures key performance data from across the organisation as it relates to the council's Corporate Plan.

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

<b>Ashford Ambition:</b> 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
<b>Green Pioneer</b> Our long term aim: Every community and individual plays their part in becoming a carbon neutral borough, through a more sustainable way of life. And the natural environment is protected and enhanced.	Tackling climate change by achieving carbon neutrality  Enabling development whilst protecting the environment  Ensuring no one is disadvantaged as we reduce the carbon footprint of our services and operations	<b>GP1:</b> Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets  <b>GP2:</b> Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable lifestyles  <b>GP3:</b> Reduce the amount of waste produced from homes and business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 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.</li> <li>- Communities in urban and rural areas value, enjoy and respect the natural environment and the abundance of wildlife increases</li> <li>- A borough free of litter, where everyone takes responsibility for minimising the amount of waste they produce</li> </ul>
<b>Caring Ashford</b> Our long term aim: Towns, villages and rural communities are welcoming, safe places for all who live and work in them, offering a high quality of life where everyone is valued and respected.	Enabling homes that are affordable to local people on low incomes  Improving wellbeing and opportunities for people living in the most disadvantage areas  Raising educational attainment and skills level of local population	<b>CA1:</b> Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely  <b>CA2:</b> Local people have access to life-long learning to ensure they have knowledge and skills to take up local employment  <b>CA3:</b> Reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people  <b>CA4:</b> Communities celebrate their heritage and the diversity of their population to build a more connected community and strengthen social responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communities feel safe and secure with easy access to locally - led services designed with communities to meet their needs</li> <li>- Local people seek positive change for themselves and others through the development of their knowledge and skills, improving social inclusion and employability</li> <li>- The lives of people with the worst health and wellbeing outcomes are improved</li> <li>- Cultural activities and events bring communities together, increasing tolerance, respect and understanding</li> </ul>
<b>Targeted Growth</b> Our long term aim: A thriving, productive local economy supporting a range of business and industry offering good work to local people and is recognised as a high quality visitor destination.	Ensuring our towns remain vibrant places and adapt to changing consumer habits  Matching local skills with the needs of employers  Attracting new industries to establish in borough and retain and grow existing business	<b>TG1:</b> Increase productivity and job opportunities and the establishment of sustainable, knowledge based and creative industries in the borough  <b>TG2:</b> Enable the improvement of digital infrastructure to support the growing needs of business, voluntary sector and residents  <b>TG3:</b> Strengthen local supply chains and increase the resilience of the local economy  <b>TG4:</b> Support growth in the visitor economy  <b>TG5:</b> Stimulate vibrant, accessible and sustainable Town Centres for residents visitors and business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The borough attracts and grows businesses and industries that are innovative and sustainable that benefit local employment and incomes</li> <li>- Fast, reliable digital connectivity is available across the whole borough so no one is disadvantaged in accessing online services or doing business</li> <li>- Local business survival rates improve</li> <li>- The borough is a 'year round' visitor destination renowned for offering quality visitor experiences</li> <li>- Our town centres are lively, safe places where people of all ages live, work and visit, coming together to enjoy events and activities</li> </ul>

## Corporate Plan Themes and Key Performance Measures

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

### Green Pioneer

#### Highlights from the Quarter

#### Ashford's Great Big Green Week 2023

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

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

#### Handlebars Vs Cars

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

## **Green Heat Network**

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

## **Electricals Recycling – Materials Focus**

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

## **Integrating Climate Considerations into the Day to Day**

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

## **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**

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

## **Solar**




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

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

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_06</b>  <b>Number of organisations committed to active travel plans cycling/walking</b>	Number of organisations committed to travel plans cycling/walking	Officers are developing a proposal for a travel plan for Ashford Borough Council staff. Work continues to explore how we can work with a local business to pilot an active travel plan within the borough to inform further role out.									
		Initiatives to get people cycling through 'guided rides' and bike repair and maintenance schemes have been successful and will continue to be offered.									

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




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



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

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

<b>CP_KPI_10</b>	% of successful refuse collections per 100,000 refuse collections made.	99.97%	99.96%		99.85%	99.96%		99.73%	99.96%		
<b>Refuse Collection Success Rate</b>											

[New Waste Contract.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#) This Cabinet report identifies the evaluation undertaken, the costs and the key changes and benefits that will occur from the proposed new waste contract.

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

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

## **Caring Ashford**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

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

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

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

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

#### **Celebrating the newly revamped Victoria Park**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Eat Well Spend Less came to Farrow Court**

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

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

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

### **Tenterden leisure Centre swimming pool reopened**

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

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_13</b> <b>Food Hygiene Rating</b>	% of businesses in the borough with a food hygiene rating above 3	98.8%	98.5%	✓	98.5%	98.5%	✓	98.2%	98.3%	✓	
<p>Ashford Borough Council's Annual Food Service Plan 2022/23, includes a review of performance in delivering official food controls during 2021/22 is available at: <a href="#">Food Services Plan 202223.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)</a></p>											
<b>CP_KPI_17</b> <b>Council Affordable Housing - New Build</b>	No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	0			4			0			Stodmarsh issues continue to hinder homes delivered in this period.
<p><a href="#">Housing Revenue Account HRA Business Plan 2022 -2052 including Financing and Affordable Homes Pro.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)</a></p>											
<b>CP_KPI_18</b> <b>Council Affordable</b>	No. of additional on-street purchase affordable	1			2			2			2 properties completed in this period.  There was one completion for, the local authority

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>Housing - On-Street Purchases</b>	homes delivered by council housing										housing fund (LAHF), 3 are also pending for LAHF (going through the conveyancing process), 2 street purchases for the HRA are also pending and 1 property completed for the rough sleeper accommodation project

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

<b>CP_KPI_19</b> <b>Homelessness Presentations</b>	Number of new triage cases received in the Quarter	394			631			733			35 homelessness applications throughout June.  8 at prevention stage  27 at relief stage
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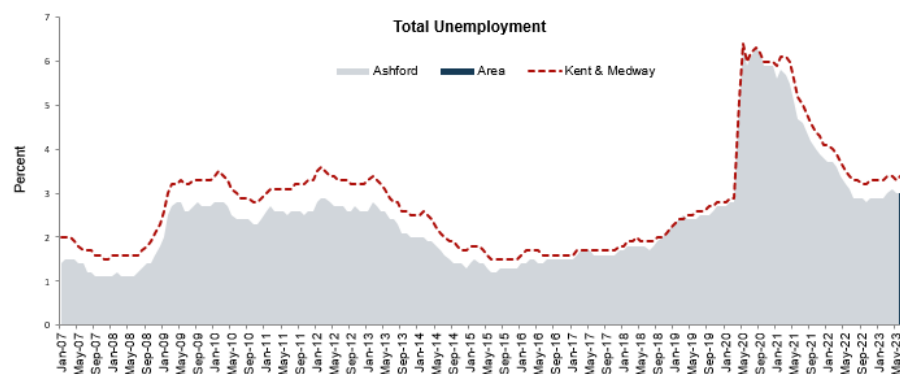
Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_19b</b> <b>Homelessness Preventions (still in accomodation)</b>	No. of households where homelessness was prevented	27			30			33			

The latest data tables on local government housing including Ashford Borough Council, covering social housing sales, homelessness, and affordable housing supply are available at the following links: [Social housing sales](#) [Homelessness](#) [Affordable housing supply](#)

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

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

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

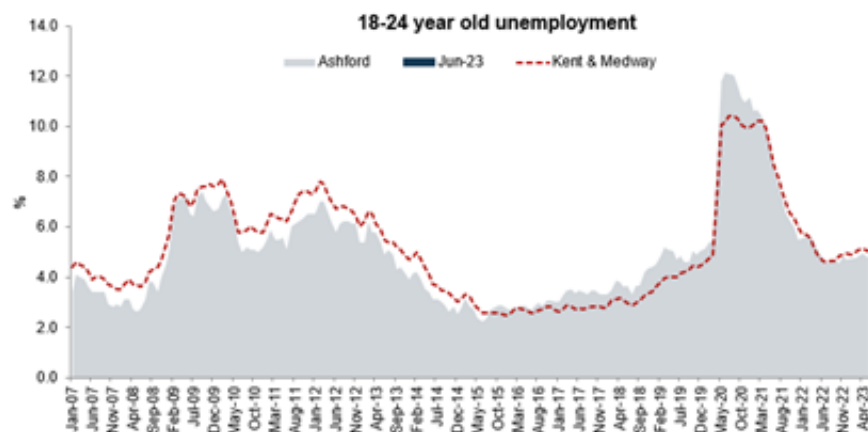


### June 2023

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



Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_22</b> <b>Unemployment 18-24yr olds</b>	Unemployment 18-24yr olds taken monthly from the Kent County Council economy and employment data	4.7%			4.8%			4.8%			June – 440 equating to 4.8%  More information available within - <a href="#">Economy and employment data - Kent County Council</a>



18-24 unemployment

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

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

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

## **Targeted Growth**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

#### **Supporting town centre businesses through tough times**

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

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

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

#### **Parking charges to rise for the first time since 2020**

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

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

#### **Ashford's street art festival UNFRAMED**

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

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

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

## Quarterly Measures

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

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

<b>CP_KPI_34</b> <b>Ashford town centre vacancy rate</b>	Ashford town centre vacancy rate	15.2%			14.3%			15.2%			Jul-23 - 335 units surveyed 51 empty (15.2%)
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The area surveyed is the High Street, Middle Row, New Rents, North Street, Bank Street, Tufton Street, County Square, Park Mall and Elwick Place. This is surveyed manually quarterly.

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

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

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

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

<b>CP_KPI_35</b>	Contribution to budget from commercial investments utilising the budgeted figures provided as part of the councils budget books. Measure to start from Sept 20	88%			93%			85%			Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.
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The Corporate Property Annual Performance Report 2021/22 reviewing revenue performance of the Council's corporate property portfolio during the financial year, as well as advising on its expected future performance: [Corporate Property Performance Annual Report 2021/22](#)

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

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

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



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

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

The Customer Service, IT and Digital Strategy was adopted at the end of June 2022 with a key focus of keeping the customer at the centre of our services. [Customer Service IT Digital Strategy.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/~/media/2022/06/20220620-customer-service-it-digital-strategy.pdf)

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

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

Ashford Borough Council's Communications team is responsible for managing the council's social media accounts. Our most active platforms that residents can engage with the council on, include Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor and Instagram.

The data will allow the Council to better understand the needs of our residents and ensure that our social media strategy is shaped by the results of the data.

With circa 50,000 combined total followers across all ABC social platforms, the Communications Team are also actively exploring methods to further grow each platform through various digital tools so that they can effectively reach more residents across the borough, including those in rural areas.

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

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

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

Please see monthly revenue as below;-

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

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

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

Busiest car parks over the last three months:

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

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

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

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

## **Our Principles**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

#### **Citizens Panel**

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Council outlines progress being made on Stodmarsh mitigation measures**










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




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

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

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

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_42 FOI Response Rate	% of freedom of information requests responded to within 20 working days	100%	95%		98%	95%		99%	95%		186 requests received -1 request completed outside the 20 day window.
CP_KPI_43 Business Rates Collection	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month	82.11%	74.25%		98.6%	99%		29.1%	24.75%		Government finance including Ashford Borough Council, covering borrowing and investment, capital payments and receipts, local Council Tax support, quarterly revenue outturn and receipts of Council Taxes and national non-domestic rates are available <a href="#">here</a>
CP_KPI_44 Council Tax Collection Rate	Percentage of council tax collected - cumulative figure per month	85.57%	73.71%		97.5%	98.25%		30.03%	24.57%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_45</b> Percentage of invoices paid on time	Percentage of invoices paid on time	Invoices paid within 30 days of the date of the invoice - 96.56 % 1st April 2022 – 17th March 2023									
<b>CP_KPI_46</b> Gas Safety Certificates	% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	99.87%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%		
<p>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.</p>											
<b>CP_KPI_47</b> Number of days sickness per full time equivalent		10.41 days per FTE					9.68 days per FTE				






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

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




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




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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_52 number of new 106 files opened	new 106 files opened	opened - 4			opened – 7			opened – 5			Committee agreed to form a Task Group to review the council's Section 106 process, recommendations available within the final report. <a href="#">S106 Task Group - FinalReport.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)</a> with a <a href="#">S106 Scrutiny Review</a> – Update provides to the committee in May 22
		Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 1			Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 0			Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 0			
		Number of 106 cases completed - 4			Number of 106 cases completed - 2			Number of 106 cases completed - 0			

CP_KPI_53 Planning Application Approvals	% of planning applications approved	92%	90%		87%	90%		88%	90%		
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The national average performance for the percentage of planning applications approved is usually around 87 to 88%. As the financial year has progressed our performance here has stabilised to around target. A recent update on the Stodmarsh situation was presented to Cabinet [Report Title: \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#), explaining the progress made towards a mitigation to this strategic issue.

CP_KPI_54 Speed of	% of major planning applications determined	88%	65%		78%	65%		67%	65%		
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>Major Planning Application Decisions</b>	within 13 weeks (or within such extended period as agreed in writing between the applicant and the local authority)										
<b>CP_KPI_54 b</b> <b>% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month</b>	% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	77%	75%		76%	75%		71%	75%		

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

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

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




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

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month</b>	amended to reflect 24 rolling month										

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

Performance in non-major schemes remains strong and above target.

<b>CP_KPI_56</b>	Number includes all conditions applications, pre-app cases, as well as applications for outline, full or reserved matters consent. Reducing backlog with	985	550		792	550		775 (603)	550		Reduction in cases can be seen this quarter although no significant changes to previous quarter commentary.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q3 2022/23			Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
	a capacity set at 550 open cases										

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

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