

**Agenda Item No:** 8  
**Report To:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Cabinet



**Date of Meeting:** Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023  
Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**Report Title:** Performance Report, Quarter 2 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 2 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 2 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
<b>Contact:</b>	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 2 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 2 - 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 taking part in Material Focus Recycle Your Electricals

The first of six E-Cycle Revival events was held in Wye on 21 October where residents were able to recycle their electricals. 0.18 tonnes of electricals were collected for recycling at the event. The next event will be held on 25 November in Tenterden.

##### Ashford joins In The Loop to boost recycling on-the-go

Nine bright, colourful and eye-catching dual recycling and general waste bins have appeared in Ashford Town Centre, as a new on-the-go recycling initiative - #InTheLoop, is launching in September 2023.




InTheLoop is a three-month trail which will make it as easy as possible for visitors to recycle empty glass, plastic bottles and cans. The initiative is a partnership between Ashford Borough Council, Kent Resource Partnership, Kent County Council, Litter Lotto, metroSTOR, N+P (dry and mixed recycling processors in Kent), and environmental charity Hubbub, made possible with funding from McDonald's.



The new bins have bold graphics showing clearly what goes in each section of the bin. The recycling section collects empty glass and plastic bottles as well as cans, so these valuable materials can be made into something new instead of going to waste.

### **Carbon literacy**

Ashford have received a Bronze award from the Carbon Literacy Trust. Our own in house course (online and face to face) has been fully accredited and other authorities in Kent have asked to use our course materials.

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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	<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 &amp; 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>									
<b>CP_KPI_09</b>  <b>Recycling Rate</b>	% of borough waste recycled or composted	46.33%	50%		52.5%	50%		54%	50		<a href="#">Defra's nationwide recycling league tables - Local authority collected waste: annual results tables (Historical) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a>
Waste data from UK local authorities is reported to WasteDataFlow with statistics available at the following links. <a href="#">WasteDataFlow Waste and recycling statistics</a>											

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_10</b> <b>Refuse Collection Success Rate</b>	% of successful refuse collections per 100,000 refuse collections made.	99.85%	99.96%		99.73%	99.96%		Missed collection in the quarter:  July – 127 August – 164 Sep – 126			Percentage not yet available for the period but missed bin figures comparable to similar quarters.

[New Waste Contract.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#) 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](#)



## **Caring Ashford**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

#### **Ashford Borough Council buys former Kent Wool Growers site and vows to breathe new life into historic location**

The former Kent Wool Growers site occupying a key location between the town centre and the railway station is set to be given a new lease of life after being bought for an undisclosed amount by Ashford Borough Council's Housing development team.

This council believes the 1.2ha site offers an unrivalled opportunity to create a vibrant community at the gateway to the town. Work is underway to shape a proposal that is likely to include mixed-use homes, commercial space, a community hub and substantial areas of green space.

Bordered by the Great Stour river to the east, the site is part of the Commercial Quarter, which includes the Connect 38 office building, International House and The Platform at The Coachworks.

#### **Court Wurtin renovation work takes shape**

Much-needed renovation work is on schedule at Court Wurtin in South Ashford, including the total refurbishment of two flats that will help meet the need for more social housing in the town.

Ashford Borough Council is refurbishing the empty flats to bring them back into use and at the same time creating a waste and storage compound store for unsightly rubbish trolleys, refurbishing a stairwell to include new roof structure, adding external wall insulation, installing PV solar panels and other improvements.

Court Wurtin is a three storey 1960s residential / commercial block, off Beaver Lane. The building comprises a local retail centre with commercial units on the ground floor and flats on the first and second floors.

### **Eat Well Spend Less roadshow visited Tenterden in September**

The Eat Well Spend Less roadshow came to Tenterden in September offering support and suggestions to counter the impacts of rising cost of living.

As with previous events this brought together a range of partner organisations including frontline NHS staff, council officers, outreach organisations and charities, in one easy-to-access place.

### **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.

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_13 <b>Food Hygiene Rating</b>	% of businesses in the borough with a food hygiene rating above 3	98.5%	98.5%		98.2%	98.3%		97.7%	98.5%		

This trend is undoubtedly caused by covid as most food businesses have suffered and experienced tremendous changes in their businesses and are still in recovery. This has had an impact on their food safety and hygiene standards. We continue to support these food businesses by providing advice, signposting and taking enforcement action where necessary.

Ashford Borough Council's Annual Food Service Plan 2022/23, includes a review of performance in delivering official food controls during 2021/22 is available at: [Food Services Plan 202223.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2022/03/24/ashford-borough-councils-annual-food-service-plan-2022-23/)

CP_KPI_17 <b>Council Affordable Housing - New Build</b>	No. of additional new build affordable homes delivered by council housing	4			0			0			Regrettably Stodmarsh restrictions still prevent us from being on site.
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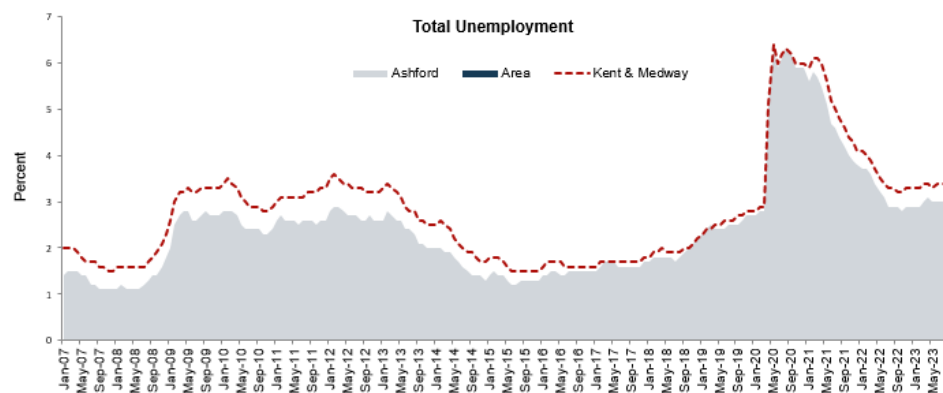
[Housing Revenue Account HRA Business Plan 2022 -2052 including Financing and Affordable Homes Pro.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2022/03/24/ashford-borough-councils-annual-food-service-plan-2022-23/)

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_18</b> <b>Council Affordable Housing - On-Street Purchases</b>	No. of additional on-street purchase affordable homes delivered by council housing	2			2			1			One property added to our stock in this quarter. Some local authority housing fund homes acquired.  HRA Business Plan is looking to increase numbers of homes again to 30.
<b>CP_KPI_19</b> <b>Homelessness Presentations</b> <b>New Triage Cases</b>	No. of new triage cases	631			733			620			New approaches to the service throughout the month
<b>CP_KPI_19b</b> <b>Homelessness Preventions (still in accommodation)</b>	No. of households where homelessness was prevented	30			33			33			Successful preventions throughout month

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_20</b> <b>Disabled Facilities Grants Completed</b>	No. of disabled facilities grants administered by the council	32			25			24			Since April 49 completed grants, a comparably good number compared with previous years.
<b>CP_KPI_20b</b> <b>Disabled Facilities Grant Spend</b>	Actual spend per month for disabled facility grants	£235,990.22			£328,260.04			£248,246.35			

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 \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](https://modern.gov.co.uk/publications/2023/07/12/disabled-adaptations-review)

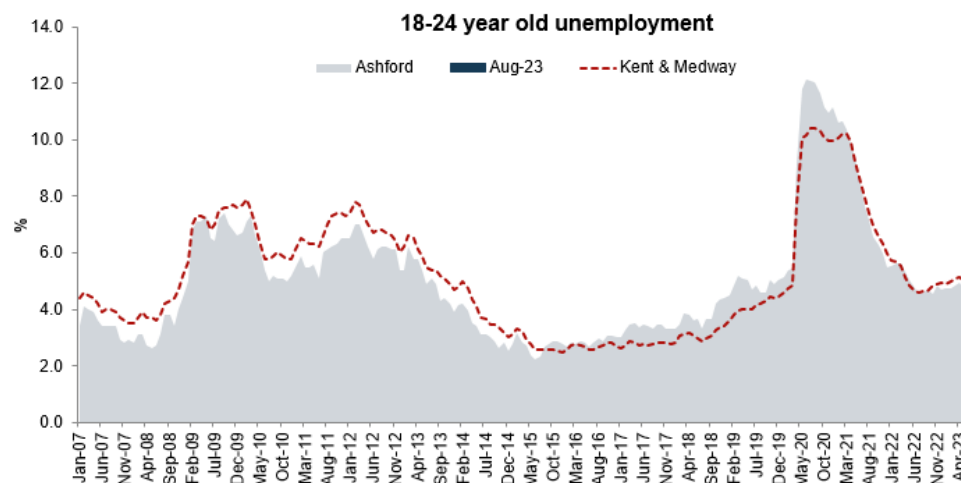
Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_21 Unemployment	Unemployment figures taken monthly from Kent County Councils Economy and employment data.	3%			3%			3%			<p>August (latest available data at time of report drafting) - 2450 unemployment count representing 3.0%</p> <p>More information available within - <a href="#">Economy and employment data - Kent County Council</a></p>



#### August 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%	+0	+0.0%	+95	+4.0%
Kent & Medway	38,330	3.4%	+120	+0.3%	+1,335	+3.6%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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	4.9%			4.8%			4.9%			August – 455 equating to 4.9%  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	455	4.9%	+15	+3.4%	+30	+7.1%
Kent & Medway	7,020	5.1%	+45	+0.6%	+565	+8.8%



Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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	1.85	10		2.1	10		2.29	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	24.64	28		24.94	28		21.11	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 46,134 tickets sold			Since start of scheme 56,306 tickets sold			Since start of scheme 70,563 tickets sold 14,257 tickets sold in the quarter.			Ticket sales remain steady and new causes continue to join.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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> This is a fun and easy sport that combines elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis.</li> <li>• <b>Cardiac Arrest Clinic:</b> This is a specialised clinic for people who have had a cardiac arrest or are at risk of having one. With expert advice and support from qualified staff.</li> <li>• <b>Home Education Clip and Climb:</b> They also complement swim sessions that are already in place for home educated children.</li> <li>• <b>Gym Induction:</b> Simplified gym induction process to make it more convenient and accessible for everyone.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Ongoing projects and activities:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Walking Football:</b> Extended the duration of this activity due to high demand, also included a dedicated group for Parkinson's patients who meet weekly.</li> <li>• <b>NEET Programme:</b> Ongoing programme at the centre, helping young people who are not in work, education or training to develop interview skills and discipline through activities such as boxing sessions.</li> <li>• <b>Kent Refuge Football:</b> Regular slot on Sunday in collaboration with Kent Refuge UK to offer sport opportunities for refugee children.</li> <li>• <b>Holiday programme:</b> Make it more sport oriented, with camps that focus on specific areas such as trampolining.</li> </ul>									

## **Targeted Growth**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

#### **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.

It has built an enviable reputation as an authority that internet service providers and housing developers can work with when it comes to planning and delivering broadband and digital infrastructure improvements in the borough.

#### **Ashford Borough Council secures UKSPF funding for new Visitor Economy project**

Ashford Borough Council is delighted to announce that it has allocated £50,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) to benefit the borough's visitor economy and hospitality businesses.

The Ashford borough is well known for its locally produced food and drink, as well as its rapidly growing wine industry with vineyards including Biddenden Vineyards, Chapel Down and Gusbourne among others, all attracting large numbers of visitors every year. This new project looks to support and further grow this important sector whilst also supporting the wider visitor economy by working with accommodation providers, visitor attractions and experiences to build an even stronger tourism offering within the borough.

We are really pleased to announce that Visit Kent, who as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) are the County's official Destination Management Organisation, will be delivering the project after taking part in a competitive tendering process.

### **Two new experiences coming to Ashford Town Centre with Little Land and Virtual Recreation**

Two new, exciting businesses are opening in Ashford Town Centre, providing residents and visitors with unique experiences – for both the young and the young at heart.

In September, Little Land, a new role-play centre for little people aged six years and under, opened its doors at Unit 24 in Park Mall.

Little Land transports children into a series of shops, cafes, a supermarket, hairdressers, vets and other recognisable high street businesses, providing them with a space to role-play and explore real life situations in a safe and stimulating environment. There is also a café and seating area for parents and carers to enjoy, as they get to sit back and relax while watching their children play.

From small children to big kids, Virtual Recreation (VRec) is set to hit Ashford Town Centre this November. VRec will transport visitors to another world via their state-of-art VR equipment, providing both Arcade VR and Free Roam virtual reality at Elwick Place.

### **Create Music Village returns to Ashford Town Centre in October**

Create Music Village (CMV) returned to Ashford Town Centre in October with a month-long celebration of music and sound. The diverse programme featured everything from bands to DJs, sing along movies to workshops, and is all driven by four core grass-roots music venues, providing something for all tastes and ages

Revelation and Coachworks return as core venues and are joined this year by Ashford Picturehouse and Low Key Tap Room. There was also a range of fringe events - many of which were FREE - hosted by venues all over the Town Centre.

### **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.

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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	9.2%			9.2%			9.4%			5437 properties - 313 exemptions and 203 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	14.3%			15.2%			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	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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.	93%			85%			91.6%			Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.
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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: \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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)	9.7%			10.5%			9.3%			

Site	Square foot let	Total square foot	Percentage let
Ellingham	61,397 sf	64,397 sf	95.3%
Carlton Road	42,065 sf	42,065 sf	100.0%
Elwick Place	92,357 sf	104,391 sf	88.5%
International House	65,087 sf	76,714 sf	84.8%
	260,906 sf	287,567 sf	90.7%

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	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_38</b> Digital uptake - % of total council /% Increase transactions completed electronically.	Digital uptake - % of total council /% Increase transactions completed electronically.	83	80	✔	90.95	80	✔	90.97	80	✔	

Month	Digital Transactions	Calls	Total Transactions	Digital Uptake %
Jul-23	74567	6911	81478	91.52%
Aug-23	75043	7068	82111	91.39%
Sep-23	66905	6644	73549	90.97%

Q1 onwards saw the utilisation of Google Analytics to measure page view stats for certain services.

Significant increases in online views have been recorded for bin collection calendar lookup, housing rent and council tax lookup and online payments.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_39 Social media engagement	Social media engagement	<u>Q4 (Jan-March)</u>			<u>Q1 (Apr-June)</u>			<u>Q2 (July- Sept)</u>			
		<b>Impressions:</b>  Facebook: 522,101 Twitter: 21,731 Nextdoor: 110,663 Instagram: 5,105			<b>Impressions:</b>  Facebook: 572,290 Twitter ('X'): 57,012 Nextdoor: 102,792 Instagram: 8,588			<b>Impressions:</b>  Facebook: 584,786 Twitter ('X'): 18,881 Nextdoor: 99,279 Instagram: 2,760			
		<b>Followers:</b>  Facebook: 11,002 Twitter: 9,109 Nextdoor: 27,996 Instagram: 2,718			<b>Followers:</b>  Facebook: 11,312 Twitter: 9,103 Nextdoor: 28,400 Instagram: 2,755			<b>Followers:</b>  Facebook: 11,646 Twitter: 9,066 Nextdoor: 28,832 Instagram: 2,793			

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	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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	289,988			262,691			307,984			

Increase during this period which is a seasonal trend over the summer holiday period.

## **Our Principles**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

#### **Update on Ashford Borough Council's approach to nutrient mitigation**

Recently, the Government proposed amendments to the emerging Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill which would have removed the need to consider nutrient neutrality matters at a local decision-making level within the affected river catchments across the country.

However, these amendments were defeated in the House of Lords, and at the time of drafting this report, it is understood that the Government does not intend to submit a new bill to address the issue as part of the King's Speech.










The Council welcomes the fact that the Government has indicated its stance on this issue but it is disappointing that positive measures to address it have yet to be announced.. The nutrient neutrality issue is, and should have always been, an issue for the highest levels of Government, with the key bodies actually responsible for water quality being accountable and delivering the solution. It cannot be appropriate for Natural England, the water companies and the Environment Agency to simply pass this burden onto Local Planning authorities to resolve.




However, this activity at the national level clearly necessitates a review of the Council's previously stated aim of delivering strategic wetlands within the borough as a means of providing mitigation for housing proposals currently caught by the need to be nutrient neutral and which are unable to deliver their own mitigation solutions.

Accordingly, the Council is now pausing work on progressing these strategic mitigation schemes with immediate effect. This is the only responsible response to the changed position at the national level and the Council cannot be expected to invest significant sums of money, at our own risk, for something that may not be required in the foreseeable future.

Instead, the Council is looking at different ways in which deliverable nutrient mitigation opportunities may be created from its own assets so that this may enable a limited number of housing schemes to be delivered to help address the need for affordable accommodation in the borough.

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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	98%	95%		99%	95%		98%	95%		190 requests received in the period 4 completed outside the 20 working day window.
CP_KPI_43 Business Rates Collection	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month	98.6%	99%		29.1%	24.75%		57.13%	49.5%		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	Percentage of council tax collected	97.5%	98.25%		30.03%	24.57%		57.83%	49.14%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>Council Tax Collection Rate</b>	- cumulative figure per month										
<b>CP_KPI_45</b> <b>Percentage of invoices paid on time</b>	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> <b>Gas Safety Certificates</b>	% 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.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_47	Number of days sickness per full time equivalent	10.41 days per FTE			9.68 days per FTE						




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

CP_KPI_48	Average wait time for customer service calls - to be benchmarked with results across Kent	0h 00m 48s	0h 01m 38s		0h 01m 12s	0h 01m 38s		0h 01m 20s	0h 01m 38s		Remains on target.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_53</b> <b>Planning Application Approvals</b>	% of planning applications approved	87%	90%		88%	90%		86%	90%		

The national average performance for the percentage of planning applications approved is usually around 87 to 88%. As the financial year has progressed our performance here has stabilised to around target. This summer, 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. It is expected that, in the short term, this may result in more refusals being issued but this is expected to be counter-balanced by the re-introduction of the non-major pre-application advice service at the end of 2023. 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.

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.

<b>CP_KPI_54</b> <b>Speed of Major Planning Application Decisions</b>	% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks (or within such extended period as agreed in	78%	65%		67%	65%		69%	65%		
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
	writing between the applicant and the local authority)										
<b>CP_KPI_54b</b>	% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	76%	75%		71%	75%		74%	75%		

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





Performance remains good across the broader period in respect of major application determinations and Q2 performance remaining above national targets enabling a return towards the rolling 24 month target.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_55 <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).	85%	75%		78%	75%		84%	75%		
CP_KPI_55b <b>% of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month</b>	% of non majors determined within 8 weeks amended to reflect 24 rolling month	86%	80%		84%	80%		83%	80%		

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 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](#)

Performance in non-major schemes has improved in Q2 and remains above target. The introduction of the Good Practice Guide is expected to consolidate and improve performance here and reduce the reliance on agreed 'extensions of time' with applicants to achieve good performance.

<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 a capacity set at 550 open cases	792	550		775	550		712	550		Reduction in cases can be seen this quarter although no significant changes to previous quarter commentary.
								(541*)			

Q2 has seen a steady reduction in the overall caseload of live cases within the Service. Numbers of decisions 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.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q4 2022/23			Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	

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, 171 live cases (inc. 7 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 below the overall target figure for the first time. Officers are continuing to take cases to the point where proposals can be agreed in all other respects pending the nutrient mitigation solution.