

**Agenda Item No:**

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



**Date of Meeting:** Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

**Report Title:** Performance Report, Quarter 3 2023/24

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

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

**Summary:** This report summarises performance against the council's suite of KPIs reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24, for the Quarter 3 period 2023/24.

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

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

**Key Decision:** No

**Significantly Affected Wards:** None

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

**I. Consider the performance data for Quarter 3 2023/24**

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

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

<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 3 2023/24


## Introduction and Background

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 With the start of the 22/23 financial year the Recovery Plan was superseded by the [Corporate Plan 22-24](#).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







These along with our underlying principles provide a framework that focuses our efforts on working towards our strategic objectives.
4. These reports seeks to provide an overview of performance against the council's key performance indicators on a quarterly basis. The council's performance framework captures key performance data from across the organisation as it relates to the council's Corporate Plan.

# Performance Report for the Corporate Plan 2022-24,

## Quarter 3 - 2023/24

<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

##### Heat Networks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_06 Active travel plans cycling/walking	<p>October update – Following internal reorganisation, Cycling and Walking has moved back to being the responsibility of the Projects and Recreation team, who now have the resource and capacity to drive this important work stream forward.</p> <p>The period has seen -</p> <p>The reviewing of current Active Travel plans with previous Culture department. Route9 identified (Outlet village connecting Town) as route of interest &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>							<p>January update - A new Draft Active Travel Strategy is being developed in line with ABC LCWIP (local) and KCWIP (Kent).</p> <p>A communications plan for ABC staff Active Travel will be launched in the Spring.</p> <p>KCC have commenced a public consultation on priority routes they have identified in the county.</p> <p><a href="#">Kent Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan   Let's talk Kent</a></p>			

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_09 Recycling Rate	% of borough waste recycled or composted	53%	50%		53.33%	50%		51% (October data only)	50%		<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. [WasteDataFlow Waste and recycling statistics](#)

CP_KPI_10 Refuse Collection Success Rate	% of successful refuse collections per 100,000 refuse collections made.	99.73%	99.96%		99.77%	99.96%		99.8%	99.96%		
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New waste contract with Suez will commence on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024 further information available at [New waste and recycling contract commencing March 2024 \(ashford.gov.uk\)](#)

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

## **Caring Ashford**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

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




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

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

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



## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_13 <b>Food Hygiene Rating</b>	% of businesses in the borough with a food hygiene rating above 3	98.2%	98.5%		97.7%	98.5%		97.8%	98.5%		

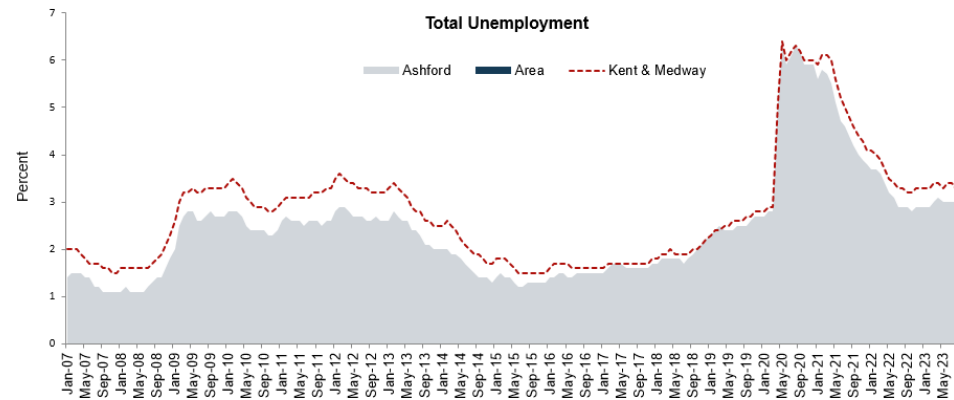
We continue to support food businesses by providing advice, signposting and taking enforcement action where necessary.

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

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

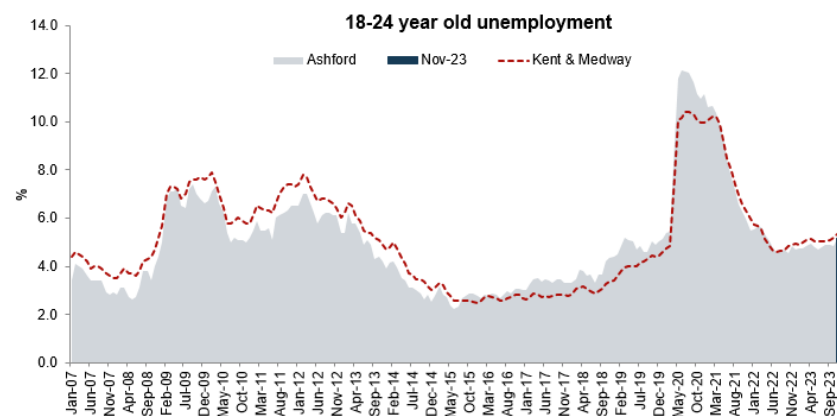
Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<b>CP_KPI_21</b> <b>Unemployment</b>	Unemployment figures taken monthly from Kent County Councils Economy and employment data.	3%			3%			3.1%			November (latest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



#### November 2023

Area	Number	Rate	Number change since last month	Percentage change since last month	Number change since last year	Percentage change since last year
Ashford	2,535	3.1%	+105	+4.3%	+205	+8.8%
Kent & Medway	39,140	3.5%	+1,000	+2.6%	+2,135	+5.8%

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
<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	4.8%			4.9%			5.2%			<p>November figures - 18-24 5.2% or 475 residents - increase of 30 on the previous month. Now equal to the Kent average of 5.2%</p> <p>More information available within - <a href="#">Economy and employment data - Kent County Council</a></p>



18-24 unemployment

Area	Number	Rate	Number change since last month	Percentage change since last month	Number change since last year	Percentage change since last year
Ashford	475	5.2%	+30	+6.7%	+30	+6.7%
Kent & Medway	7,350	5.3%	+150	+2.1%	+575	+8.5%

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_32  Support to 'vulnerable' groups through leisure centre activity	Support to 'vulnerable' groups through leisure centre activity	Latest data from Freedom leisure's quarterly monitoring report covering - 1st September 2023 to 30th November 2023									
		<b><u>New in this quarter:</u></b>									
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Walking Cricket:</b> An expansion of the walking programme in Ashford, which has seen a weekly walking cricket session set up, working in partnership with Kent Cricket Community Trust. A slowed-down version of the outdoor game.</li> <li>• <b>Sensory Football:</b> Ashford Sensory Football Club runs a weekly football session, specifically targeted at a key demographic. The club is the only one in Kent to offer this type of session that attracts participants from across the whole of Kent. A safe and welcoming environment, that gives both the participants and parents an opportunity to relax and have fun.</li> <li>• <b>Refugee Cricket:</b> Working in partnership with Kent Cricket Community Trust, a weekly session has been set up to run an indoor Cricket session for the local refugee community. This gives the local community the opportunity to try or continue playing a sport they love.</li> <li>• <b>One You Kent:</b> A partnership has been set up with One You Kent for monthly visits to the Stour to deliver NHS Health Checks and Blood Pressure checks for the centre members. One You Kent also links up with Julie Rose Stadium to deliver the same checks at both Freedom Leisure venues in Ashford.</li> </ul>									
		<b><u>Ongoing projects and activities:</u></b>									
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Swim School:</b> Swim school is continuing to grow, providing the opportunity for so many local children the chance to learn to swim. Expansion of more schools to have more children learn to swim in place for next year.</li> <li>• <b>Walking Football:</b> Ongoing sessions that take place twice a week, a key element of the planned expansion of the Walking Programme provision across the Ashford Contract.</li> <li>• <b>Walk 2 Jog:</b> A long-term and established project at Julie Rose Stadium that tackles inactivity, loneliness and isolation.</li> <li>• <b>Kent Refuge Football:</b> Regular slot on Sunday in collaboration with Kent Refuge UK to offer sports opportunities for refugee children.</li> </ul>									



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

## Targeted Growth

### Highlights from the Quarter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **New schemes launched to support businesses in the borough**

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

#### **Ashford Town Centre Business Grants**

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

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

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

**Ashford Borough Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise Support programme**

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

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

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

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_33  Business survival - current vacancy rates	Business survival, measure based upon our business rates records  Current Vacancy rates	9.2%			9.4%			9.9%			

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

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

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

Vacancy rates peaked at 20% in September 2020, due to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Although improved from the low, vacancy rates remain significantly above the previous low of 8% in November 2017, and remain above national benchmarks, which were 11.2% at the end of 2023.

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

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

<b>CP_KPI_35</b>  <b>Contribution to budget from commercial investments</b>	Contribution to budget from commercial investments utilising the budgeted	85%			91.6%			78.98%			Figure based on Ellingham, Carlton Road, Elwick Place, International House, Matalan and Wilkos.
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Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
	figures provided as part of the councils budget books.										

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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




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

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




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

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

#### Ashford Town Centre income –

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

#### Tenterden icome –

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

## **Our Principles**

### **Highlights from the Quarter**

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

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

#### **Full Council decision on Civic Centre move proposals**

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

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

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

#### **Council renews pledge to lead the way in broadband provision**

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

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

## Quarterly Measures

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_42 FOI Response Rate	% of freedom of information requests responded to within 20 working days	99%	95%		98%	95%		98%	95%		178 requests received in the period - 2 answered outside the required 20 working day window.
CP_KPI_43 Business Rates Collection	% of national non-domestic rates collected by the council - cumulative figure per month	29.1%	24.75%		57.13%	49.5%		82.28%	74.25%		Government finance including Ashford Borough Council, covering borrowing and investment, capital payments and receipts, local Council Tax support, quarterly revenue outturn and receipts of Council Taxes and national non-domestic rates are available <a href="#">here</a>
CP_KPI_44 Council Tax Collection Rate	Percentage of council tax collected - cumulative figure per month	30.03%	24.57%		57.83%	49.14%		85.4%	73.71%		

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

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

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

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

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

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_46 Gas Safety Certificates	% of ABC properties with up to date gas safety certificates	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%		

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

CP_KPI_47 Number of days sickness per full time equivalent		9.68 days	9.8 days	10.3 days	Sickness absence per employee Q3 2023/2024 01 October 2023 to 31 December 2023.
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A total of 1,267.02 days were lost due to sickness absence during the quarter 01.10.23 to 31.12.23; annualised this figure would be 5,068.08. FTE at 31.12.23 was 491.66. Therefore, total days sickness per FTE (annualised for a 12-month period) equals 10.3 days. Please note that this is a winter quarter which has been annualised and absence levels are higher during this peak period of seasonal illnesses

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_48  Average Speed of Customer Service Calls Answered	Average wait time for customer service calls	0h 01m 12s	0h 01m 38s	✔	0h 01m 20s	0h 01m 38s	✔	0h 00m 48s	0h 01m 38s	✔	Remains on target.
CP_KPI_51  number of ongoing litigation/court proceedings (volume measure)	number of ongoing litigation/court proceedings ( Volume measure)	Number of ongoing litigation matters = 167 (increase further due to disrepair claims)  Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0			Number of ongoing litigation matters = 140  Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0			Number of ongoing litigation matters = 153  Number of cases where costs have been awarded against ABC = 0			Measure covers those litigation/court proceedings being furthered by legal services.

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_52  number of new 106 files opened	number of new 106 files opened	Number of new 106 files opened – 4			Number of new 106 files opened – 3			Number of new 106 files opened – 9			
		Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 1			Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 5			Number of Draft 106 agreements sent out – 2			
		Number of 106 cases completed - 0			Number of 106 cases completed - 2			Number of 106 cases completed - 2			









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

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

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

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




Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_54 <b>Speed of Major Planning Application Decisions</b>	% of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks (or within such extended period as agreed in writing between the applicant and the local authority)	44% - revised figure <del>67%</del>	65%		67% - revised figure <del>69%</del>	65%		88%	65%		
CP_KPI_54b <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	63% - revised figure <del>74%</del>	75%		66% - revised figure <del>74%</del>	75%		65%	75%		End of Q2 23/24 signified the end of the most recent designation review period (21-23). This is a 24 month period measuring performance of the LPA on speed of determination for major applications. The designation threshold is 60%.

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

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

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

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






<b>CP_KPI_55</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).	77% - revised figure	75%		87% - revised figure	75%		80%	75%		
<b>Speed of Non-Major Planning Application Decisions</b>		78%			84%						

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

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

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

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

Code & Short Name	Description	Q1 2023/24			Q2 2023/24			Q3 2023/24			Latest Note
		Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	Value	Target	Status	
CP_KPI_56	Number includes all conditions applications, pre-app cases, as well as applications for outline, full or reserved matters consent. Reducing backlog with a capacity set at 550 open cases	775	550		712	550		655	550		
Number of live planning casework reducing backlog		(541)			(471)						

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

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