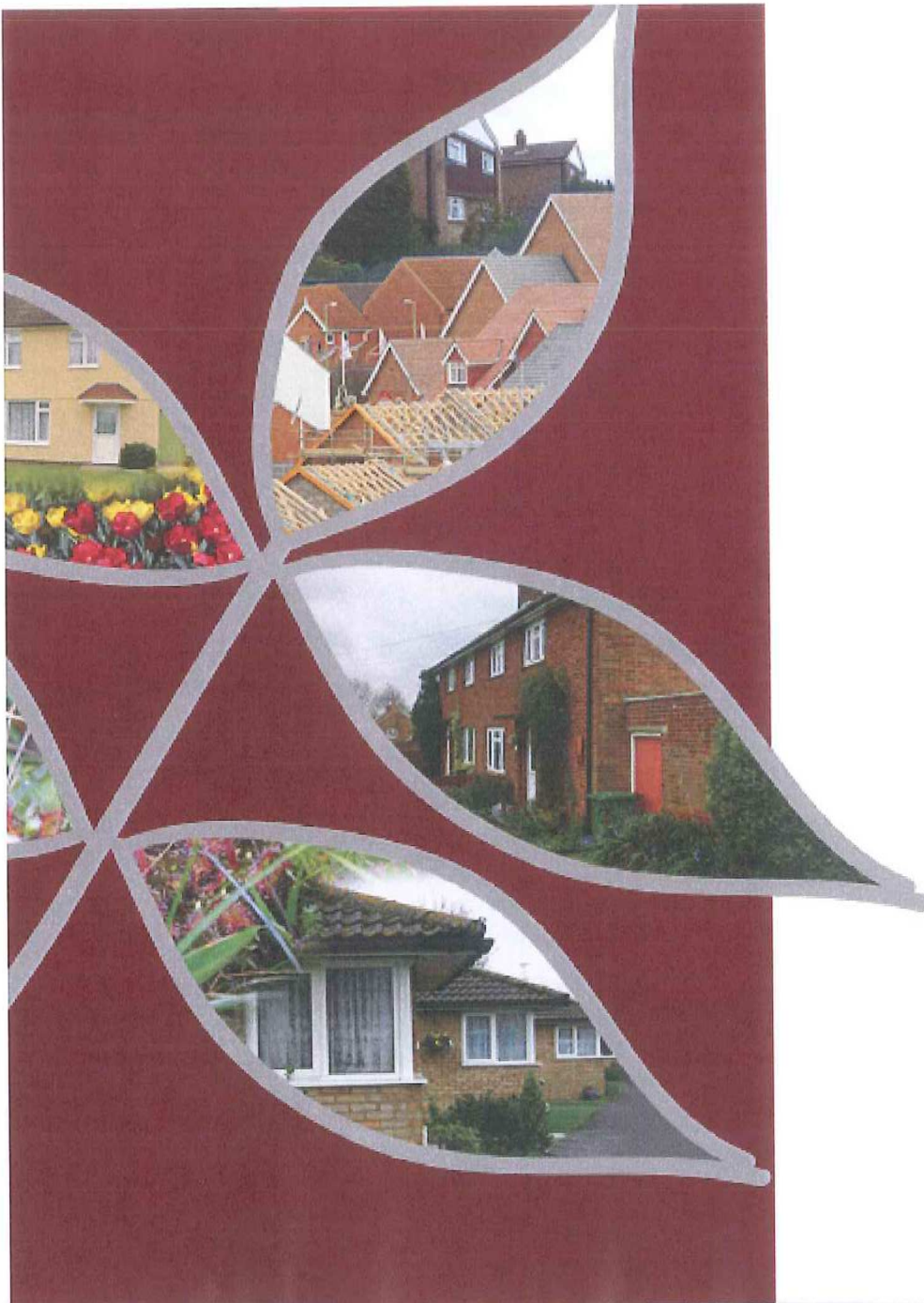




ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Customers, Homes and Property Quarterly Performance Report

July 2011

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1. EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

* Local Authority New Build and HCA funding update (Owner Paul McKenner 01233 330419)

(Corporate Project: Lead Members Cllrs Wood and Hicks)

Round 1 update: All six sites, totalling 27 properties have now been completed and handed over to the Council for letting. Four of the sites were completed at the end of March 2011 with the two remaining sites Gerlach House and Blake Court completed in June. The development of these sites has given a significant lift in social benefit and has not only provided valuable homes but has improved the quality of life for those that live in the vicinity. An official opening is planned for July to celebrate the success in building the first new council homes in some twenty years. Photos of the new build bungalows at Goteley Mere and houses at Towers View are shown below:



Round 2 update: All sites have received planning permission, Beaver Lane was recently resubmitted due to a drainage run being located within the original plan. The other ten sites are progressing well with the exception of Luckley House, which is taking longer than originally planned, though should be completed by March 2012. The other nine sites are due to be completed by October this year. Progress on each sites will be provided to ward members on a regular basis. Round 2 covers in total 44 homes.

Round 3 update: Orion Way contamination measures are underway and will be completed in July. At such time the Council's newly appointed contractor Westridge Construction will commence the construction work and complete by March 2012, providing 9 new properties.

Round 4 update: Members will be aware from the latest cabinet meeting on 9 June, the Council has made an application to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to support an application to build 59 new council homes. The bid has progressed through a number of stages, indications are that Ashford's bid is likely to be supported. It is expected that the ministerial announcement will be made in July which may coincide with the July Cabinet meeting. Should this be the case a verbal update will be provided.

* Update on CO₂ reductions in the Council's Housing Stock (Owner Chris Tillin 01233 330483)

At the end of March 2011 there had been a reduction of 14% in the CO₂ emissions from the Council's housing stock from a starting point of April 2005. This represents a reduction of 2,860 tonnes from 19,860 to 17,010. The Council is on track to achieve its planned 20% reduction by March 2014. Over half of the 5,000 Council homes have high efficiency "A" rated condensing boilers which has increased the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) - industry standard rating for council properties in Ashford, and will continue to do so as the boiler upgrade programme continues. In addition external wall insulation has been installed to a number of properties in order to increase their thermal efficiency and a programme of installing Photovoltaic (PV - solar panels) panels to properties has commenced. Trials of air-source heat pumps and other sustainable technologies are underway and will be rolled out if proved successful.

(Additional background: PVCu double glazed windows and doors were fitted to all properties between 1987 and 1996, increasing sound and thermal insulation levels and reducing heating costs. By 1993 the installation of central heating to all properties was completed, previously most properties used solid fuel and most were converted to gas. In 1995 loft and cavity wall installation programme was completed which ensured that properties were upgraded to a thickness of 200mm for lofts. All cavity walls that could be insulated were completed as well.)

*** Supporting People update (Owner Richard Robinson 01233 330405)**

In March this year our sheltered housing service was inspected by the Supporting People (SP) team using a revised Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). Regrettably there were a couple of areas that the SP inspector felt Ashford was not delivering to a necessary standard (most notably lack of formal training in safeguarding children for our Scheme Managers, and support plans that did not set sufficient "SMART" objectives for clients). As a result of this inspection we were deemed to be a failing service, i.e. a D grade.

In response to this, two things have happened. Firstly all necessary remedial work has been undertaken and completed to ensure full compliance. We are now awaiting a re-inspection to confirm that this action is sufficient. Secondly a meeting was held with the Head of Supporting People to raise a number of concerns over the handling of the inspection process. Broadly speaking, our own self assessment suggested that our performance had improved since July 2008, when we received an A grade and to be suddenly deemed to be failing was a shock.

When Ashford is re-assessed to check that the failing areas have been addressed, all the SP inspector can do is rate the service at a C grade. However, we are due to submit a further annual self assessment and have been asked to do this at the same time as the re-inspection. This could improve the our sheltered service to an overall B grade. The re-assessment is due to take place shortly.

If we assume that we achieve a B grade rating Ashford would be paid at a rate of £9.24 per client per week from April 2012 rather than £8.24. However with the reduction in SP funding nationally we are anticipating that the service will receive £3 per client per week less from April 2012. With just over 400 sheltered clients this equates to over £60,000 less to fund the Scheme Manager service.

In terms of the Scheme Manager service, a review has commenced to consider not only how we can address the reduction in income but also how the service should be shaped to respond to likely future changes in the short to medium term to ensure that Ashford Borough Council continues to deliver to its tenants.

Reductions in alarm funding highlighted in the April 2011 report will now have an impact of reducing income by over £30,000 from April 2012, though this will more directly impact on the Ashford Monitoring Centre who have been advised of the funding cuts for their service.

*** Ashford Gateway Plus update (Owner Julie Rogers 01233 330856)**

Ashford Gateway Project Board made the decision that the opening of the building will take place on Monday 18 July, with an official opening anticipated to take place in October. Volunteers have been recruited to carry out the role of Gateway Navigators and will receive their training in early July.

Communication to the public has commenced and Brogdales have confirmed that they will be opening the café on level 2. Tours for staff and Members are being scheduled for July/early August.

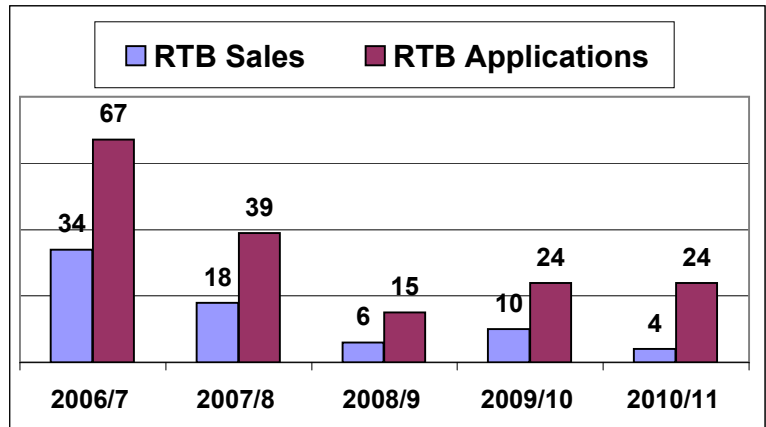
*** Housing Strategy (Owner Jennifer Shaw 01233 330451)**

The Housing Strategy 2008-2011 is due for renewal during this year having achieved 89% of its actions. The new Housing Strategy 2011-2016 will be developed during this year, commencing with a discussion paper to Members and many other partners and stakeholders. This paper notes achievements to date, highlight the issues and challenges to be addressed and set out draft priorities to deliver good quality housing and housing related services, to meet the diverse range of needs to the Borough of Ashford.

The responses to this paper, together with feedback from meetings and forums will inform the drafting of the Housing Strategy document. The aim is to have a draft published for consultation during the Autumn with a view to adoption before the end of 2011. The main themes are likely to be based around; maximising the supply of affordable housing, encouraging community cohesion and sustainability, supporting independent living, ensuring homes of decent quality and preventing homelessness.

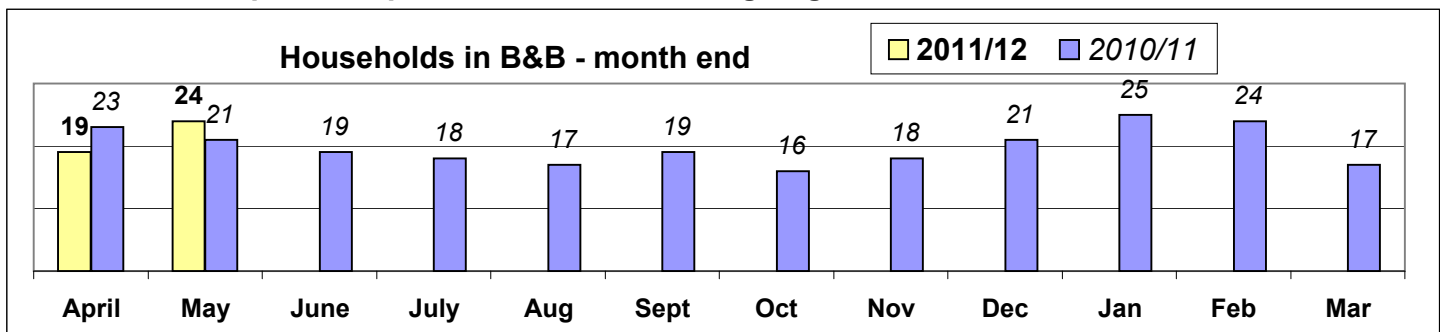
2. RIGHT TO BUY (RTB) UPDATE (Owner Sue Major 01233 330531)

- * To the end of June 2011 there were 5 property sold under Right to Buy, with 1 potential sales in the pipeline. Sales continue to run at low levels.
- * 7 applications have been made to the end of June and interest remains low.
- * RTB sales nationally remain subdued reflecting economic circumstances and the limited availability of suitable finance packages for borrowers.

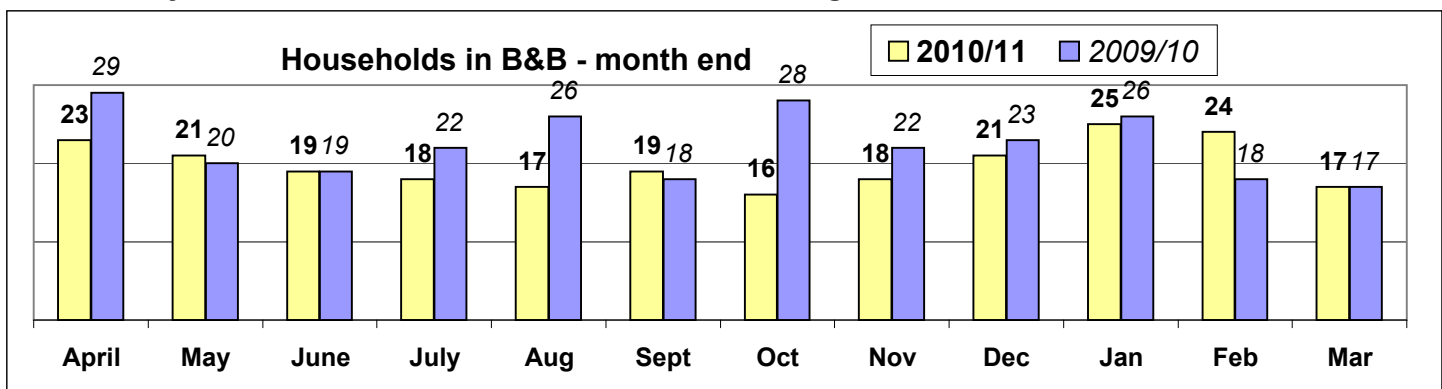


3. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION UPDATE (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

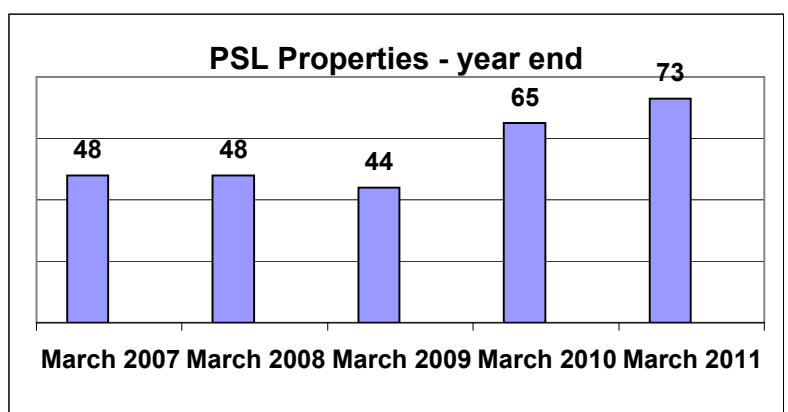
- * At the end of May 2011 the numbers of Households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) was 24. Though numbers to date are similar to last year there continues to be apprehension on future trends and the potential pressure on the service going forward.



- * During the 2010/11 financial year the month end B&B numbers were marginally lower than in 2009/10 reflecting the success of the preventative agenda with its additional resources funded by the contribution from Private Sector Leasing.

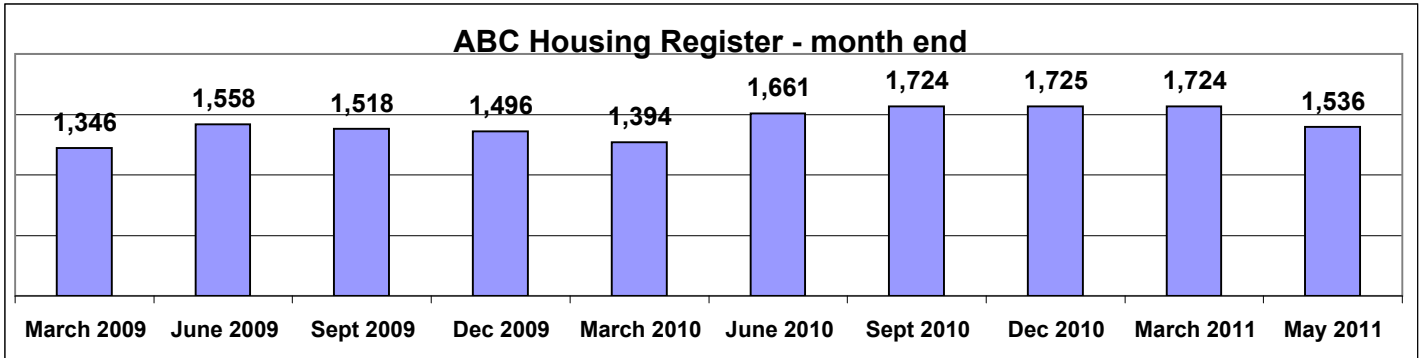


- * Number of Private Sector Leasing (PSL) properties at the end of May stood at 70. The budget for 2011/12 does not include any material increases, other than churn in the number of PSL properties during the year as properties are returned to landlords. This activity continues to remain dependant on Housing Benefit (HB) rules and funding and is potentially exposed by any reductions in HB.



4. HOUSING REGISTER AND CBL NUMBERS (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

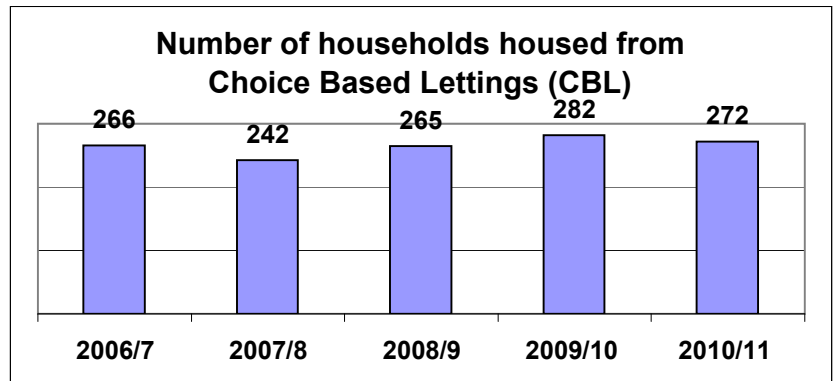
* Housing Register numbers at the end of May 2011 decreased to 1,536.



* Numbers housed via Choice Based Lettings (CBL) last year was 272. For the first two months of 2011/12 an additional 122 were housed.

* Average waiting time for a successful council housing application in 2010/11 was 15 months.

* Since April 2011, 11 people from outside the borough were housed - 10 with a local connection.

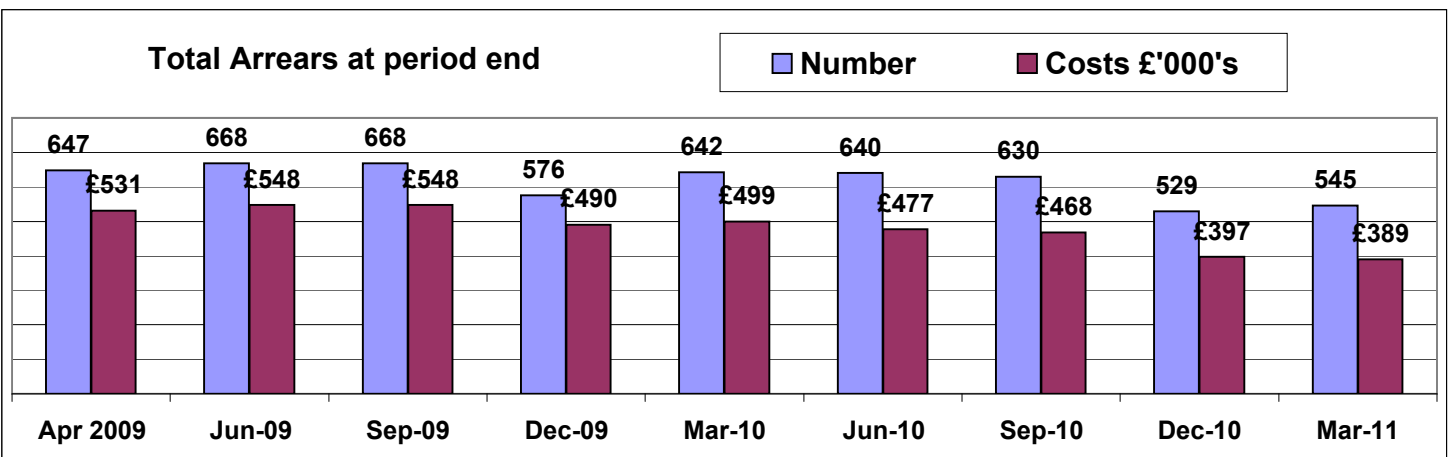
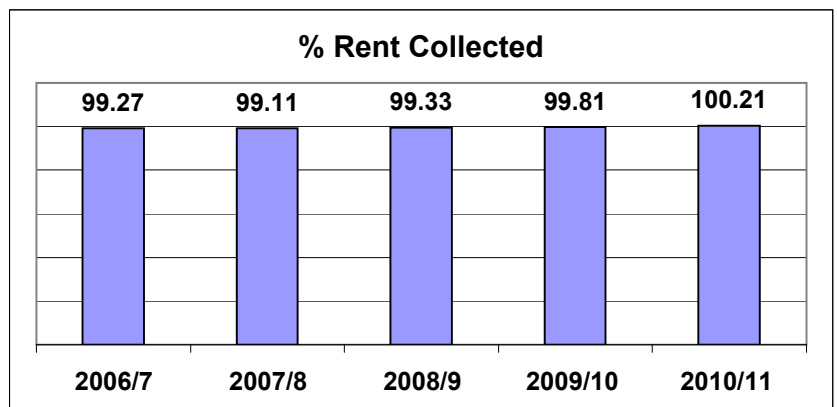


5. COUNCIL HOUSING RENT COLLECTION & TENANTS ARREARS LEVELS

(Owners Jean Williams - rents 01233 330426 + Rebecca Wilcox - tenant arrears 01233 330233)

* Total rent collected in 2010/11 from all council housing properties was at an all time high of over 100%. This continues the high council rent collection levels of recent years in Ashford. A collection figure of over 100% is due to the additional collection of advanced payments.

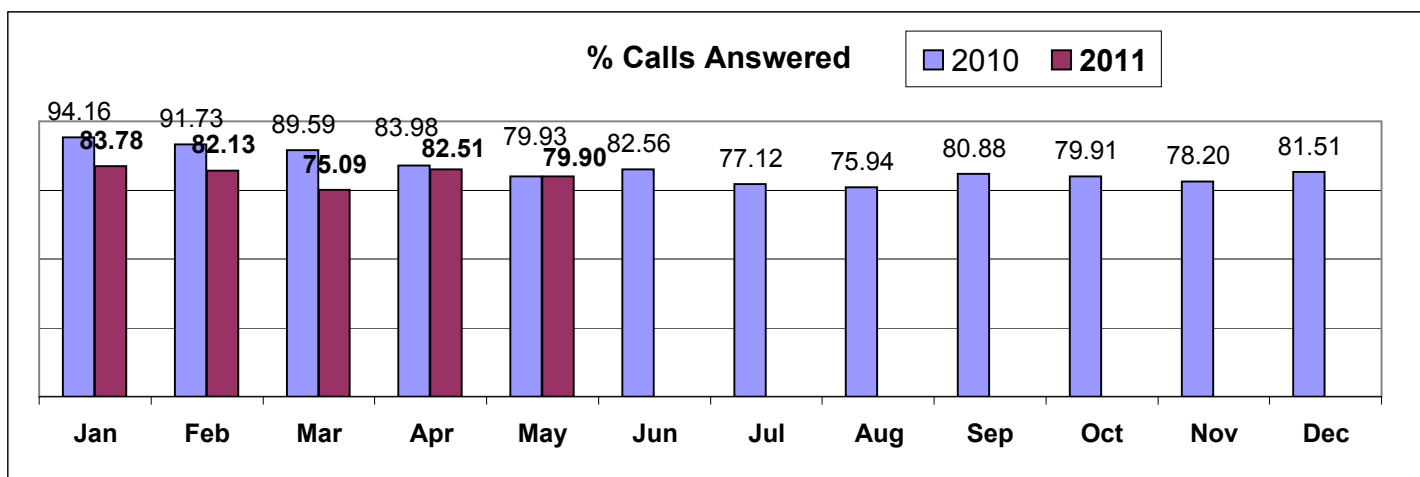
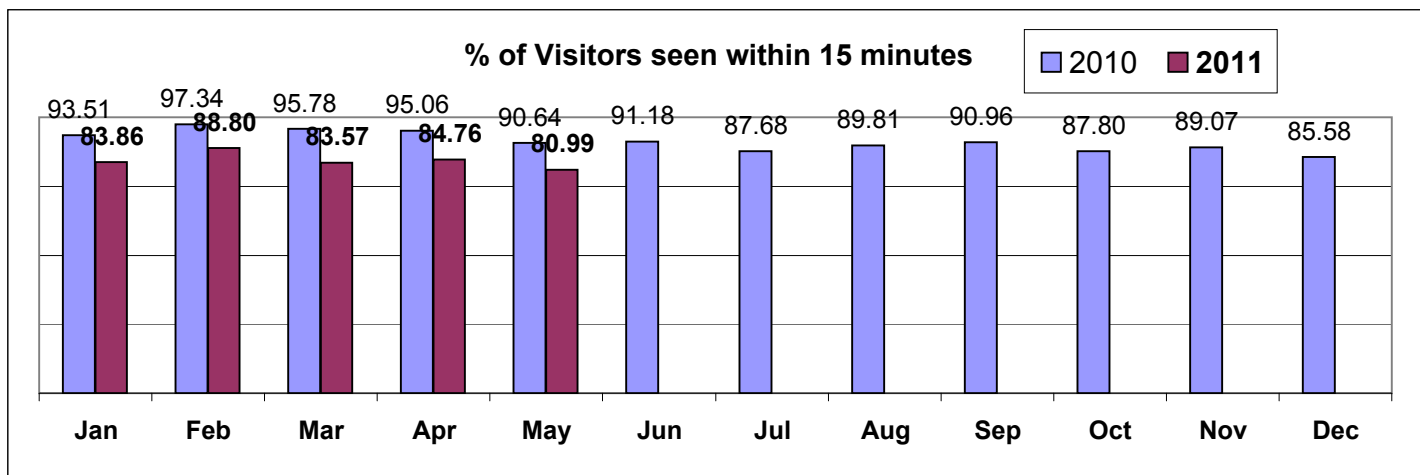
* The levels of total tenants arrears in the 2010/11 year reduced by over £100,000 during the year. This reflects the national trend of people reducing their debt levels during the current difficult economic period and good arrears management in the service.



6. CUSTOMER SERVICE UPDATE (Owners Julie Rogers 01233 330856)

Pressure remains on the service and the following months will be a transitional period with the opening of Gateway Plus in July 2011.

* % of Visitors seen within 15 minutes and % of calls answered in 2011 continue to run at a lower level than in 2010. All measures are currently affected by the volume of Gateway Plus training plus staff resignations and the recruitment of new staff.



7. AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN ASHFORD (Owner Paul McKenner 01233 330419)

(Corporate Project: Lead Members Cllrs Wood and Hicks)

* In 2010/11 a record 266 affordable properties were delivered in the Borough of Ashford. During the first 2 months of the new financial year a further 22 were delivered of which 18 were for rent and 4 for shared ownership. These numbers included 3 Council new build properties and 10 properties delivered on the former Wyvern School site along the Hythe Road, now known as Greystones which were developed by West Kent Housing Association.

