



Annual Report  
Formerly the Best Value Performance Plan

**2006-2007**

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## 1. Foreword

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### Foreword from the Leader and Chief Executive

Welcome to the Ashford Borough Council Annual Report, which provides an overview of council services, highlights the council's achievements from April 2006 to March 2007 and sets out our improvement plans for the coming year.

Over the year, the council has worked hard to provide services to our residents that contribute to improving the quality of their lives. We were delighted to see that our achievements have included:

- Improved services to our elderly and disabled housing tenants through the introduction of a Handiest Van in Kent scheme.
- The launch of a brand for Ashford, an important tool to promote investment and the creation of new jobs in the borough.
- The provision of a base for six community groups at Swanton House, Ashford.
- The redevelopment of the Stour Centre to provide state of the art sports and leisure facilities. The Centre will open in the summer of 2007.
- Improvements to the ring road to make the town centre and its surroundings a more attractive area for both businesses and shoppers.
- Works to Junction 10 of the M20 to improve traffic capacity.
- Agreement to the Tenterden Healthcheck, a project to safeguard the quality of its urban and rural environment and to improve facilities.
- Progression of development works to extend County Square which is due to open in Spring 2008.

Ashford Borough Council has played an instrumental role in the success of these projects often working in partnership with a range of other government, public, private and not for profit organisations. As a council we have retained our plan-making and development control powers so we can exercise genuine community leadership and provide real democratic accountability for all the changes and improvements that are taking place in the borough.

Last year saw a review of the council's Corporate Plan. To support this we conducted a survey with residents to ask what they thought the important issues for the council were. The survey results helped us to develop our new 2007 – 2010 Corporate Plan (further details of this can be found in section 5 of this report). The overarching focus of the plan underpins our mission statement and sees the council striving towards the continued provision of quality service, a better environment and safer communities.

Our successes this year have all been achieved against a background of the lowest council tax in Kent for our residents. The council intends to maintain low council tax charges whilst still providing good quality services.

We look forward to the year ahead

Councillor Paul Clokie  
Leader of the Council

David Hill  
Chief Executive

## 2. Your Views Count

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The council believes in being open and honest and undertakes to engage and consult with residents. If you have any questions or comments with regards to the Annual Report including the kind of information you are interested in and would like included within the report or else if you just want further information on the content of the report please contact the officer named below.

Hardcopies of this Annual Report are available to view in the Civic Centre's Contact Centre, local library and gateway centre. Should you be unable to download the document from the Internet you may request a copy by contacting the number shown below.

Philip Bond

Performance Review officer

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### 3. About the Borough

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|            |                  |
|------------|------------------|
| Size       | 224 square miles |
| Population | 110,000 people   |
| Households | 47,900           |

The Borough of Ashford is the largest district in Kent and is located at the heart of the county's finest countryside. Containing a mix of rural and urban communities, the Borough covers the main towns of Ashford and Tenterden, along with 38 villages that all have their own distinct character. It is no surprise that the beautiful settings have inspired so many writers; the village of Pluckley provided the setting for local author HE Bates' "The Darling Buds of May", while Jane Austen depicted characters and scenes from the village of Godmersham in her novel "Pride and Prejudice". Great Maytham Hall at Rolvenden contains the ancient walled garden that prompted Frances Hodgson Burnett to write the children's novel "The Secret Garden".



The town of Tenterden, known as the 'Jewel of the Weald', is popular with visitors due to its host of specialist shops, tearooms, inns and restaurants which epitomise the best of traditional Kent. The town of Ashford is a booming retail and business centre with a busy high street. Development projects are ongoing to enhance the town such as the extension to the County Square Shopping Centre.

#### Leisure

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Ashford prides itself on providing some of the best sporting facilities in the South East with an international standard athletics stadium and two first-class leisure centres. There are also numerous recreation grounds which are used for football, cricket, tennis, netball and bowls and casual recreational spaces such as parks, bridleways, riverside walks and children's play areas. A bowling alley, a 12-screen cinema, an indoor bowls hall and a wide choice of restaurants completes a comprehensive selection of leisure pursuits.

#### Transport

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Ashford has been a transport hub since the 1600s when it was primarily a market town, developing with the arrival of the railway in 1842 and foundation of the Railway Works in 1846. Today, Ashford still has excellent transport links: it is just off of the M20 motorway with junctions to the north and to the south of the town, 20 minutes from Dover, 90 minutes from London and at the junction of five major rail routes. Ashford's International Station also brings an exciting range of destinations within a couple of hours travelling time, with Eurostar trains departing regularly for Lille, Paris and Brussels.

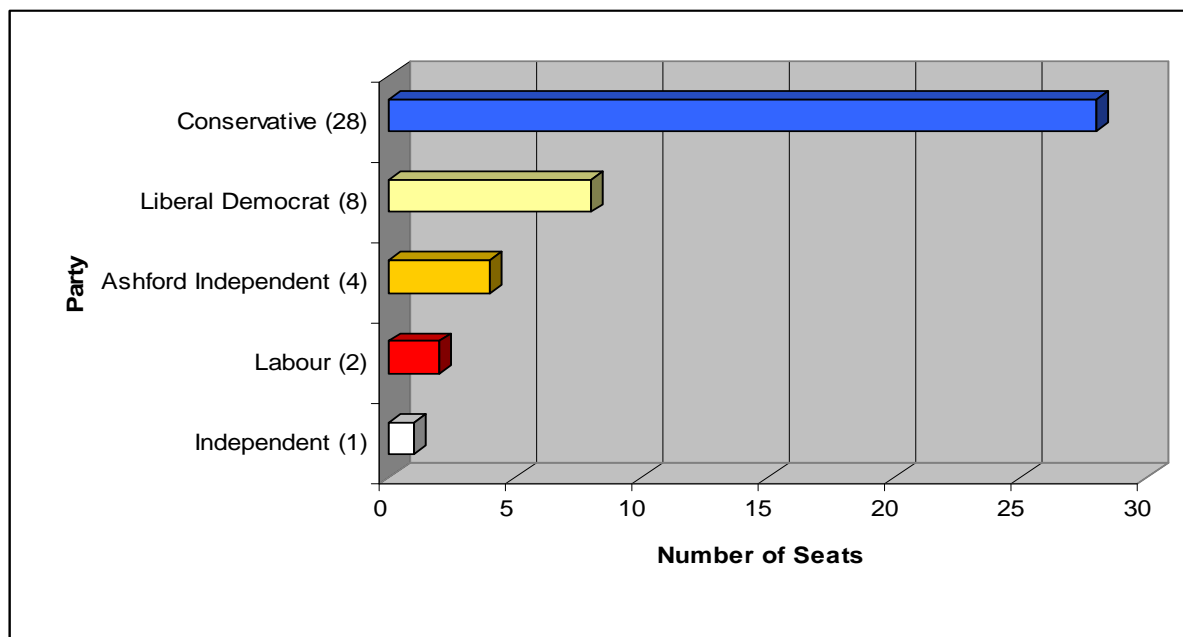
#### Ashford: Best Placed In Britain

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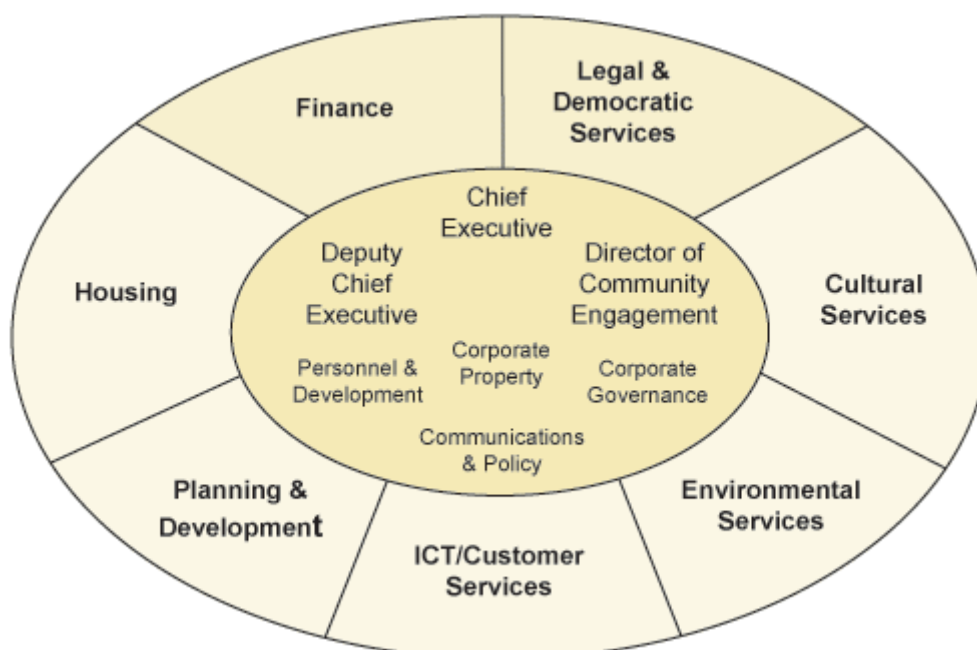
The Borough of Ashford is a place of great variety and contrasts, from being the home of the strikingly designed McArthur Glen Designer Outlet to Imperial College's campus in the village of Wye. Our strategic position between London, Paris and Brussels, coupled with excellent road and rail connections makes it the ideal location to live and work. An extensive programme of projects to stimulate and sustain growth means that the unique character of the Borough is continuously evolving, combining a rich heritage with the vibrancy of a modern international gateway.

## 4. About the Council

Ashford Borough Council is made up of 43 councillors who are elected to represent their local communities. It operates with a Leader and Cabinet system, rather like the Government Cabinet, with an Executive made up of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and four other elected councillors. Each Executive member has a portfolio of work for which they have personal responsibility. The Executive normally meets every month and makes decisions within agreed budgets and policies. Some decisions can only be taken by the full Council, which meets five times a year; and is the principal forum for major political debate and the ultimate decision-making body. Following elections in May 2007 the current political make-up of the Council is shown below. To learn more about our Councillors please follow this link: <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/cgi-bin/members/index.cfm>



Ashford Borough Council employs approximately 520 staff (including Stour Leisure employees). The arrangement of the services is shown below:



## 4.1 Local Government Functions

There is a two-tier structure in place where functions and services are split between Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council. At an even more local level there are also 38 parish and town councils in the Borough. There is some degree of overlap between the different levels of local government and with partnership and cross boundary working increasing there is a more seamless service for members of the public. The table below shows how the responsibilities for service delivery are divided.

| SERVICE   | Ashford Borough Council | Kent County Council | Parish Councils |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Education   |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Environmental health                              | ✓                       |                     |                 |
| Collection of council tax and non-domestic rates  | ✓                       |                     |                 |
| Highways (traffic management and street lighting) |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Housing   | ✓                       |                     |                 |
| Payment of Housing and Council Tax Benefit        | ✓                       |                     |                 |
| Libraries   |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Local plans and planning applications             | ✓                       |                     |                 |
| Parking (on street and public)                    | ✓                       | ✓                   |                 |
| Public conveniences                               | ✓                       |                     | ✓               |
| Recreation, arts and museums                      | ✓                       | ✓                   | ✓               |
| Social services                                   |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Strategic planning and development                | ✓                       | ✓                   |                 |
| Trading standards                                 |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Transport   |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Waste disposal                                    |                         | ✓                   |                 |
| Waste collection                                  | ✓                       |                     |                 |

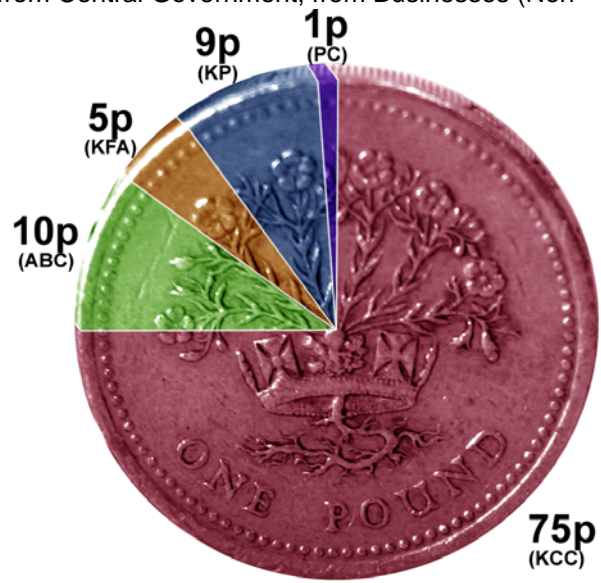
## 4.2 Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Local Authority Service

During 2006-2007 the Council followed and implemented the principles of the Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in all workforce matters and contracting.

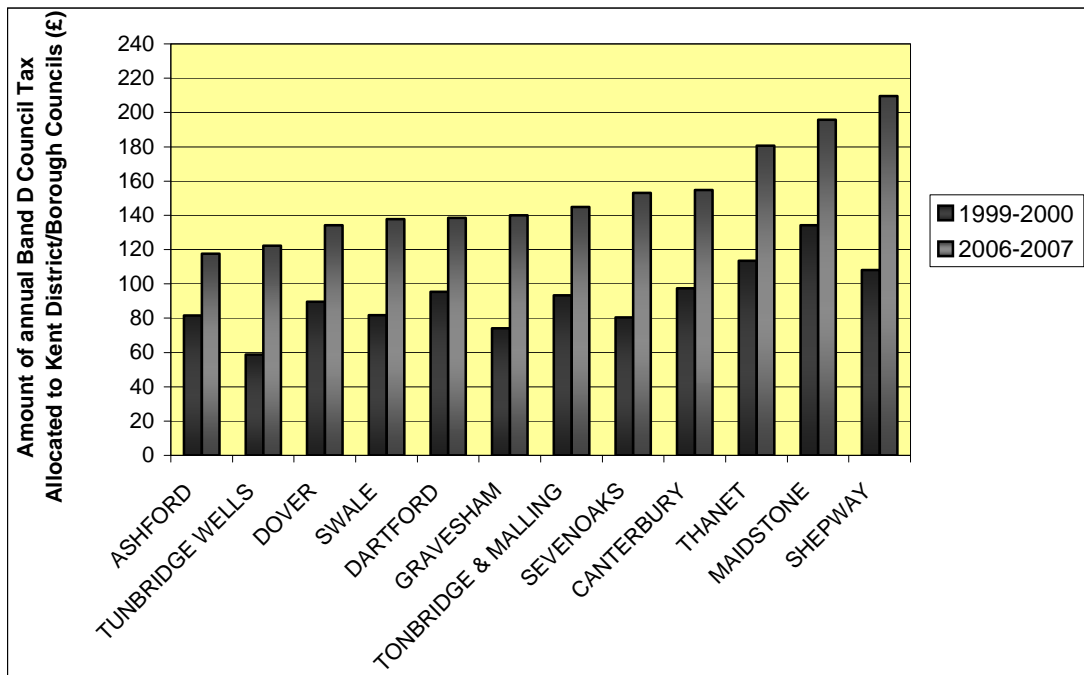
### 4.3 Council Tax

The Council receives money in the way of grants from Central Government, from Businesses (Non-Domestic Rates) and by charging for a range of services offered by the Council. Total income from these sources is not enough to meet the cost of providing services and the difference is made up by council tax.

The adjacent diagram shows how the council tax paid by residents of Ashford Borough is allocated to the different tiers of local government to provide the services listed previously. For each pound you pay, the rounded figures are: Kent County Council (KCC) 75p, Kent Police Authority (KP) 9p, Kent Fire Authority (KFA) 5p, Ashford Borough Council 10p and parish councils (PC) collectively 1p.



Ashford Borough Council has maintained its council tax at the lowest rate in Kent whilst still delivering a comprehensive range of services.



## 4.4 Budget

A summary of the Council's Revenue Budget for 2006/2007 is shown below. The Council's full accounts for 2005-2006 may be found by following the following [link](#). The Council's full accounts for 2006-2007 will be available once they have been approved by the Audit Commission and a link to them will be included on this page..

| FINAL OUTTURN 2006/07                                 |                   |                   |                   |                 |                      |                           |                    |                 |                 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| SERVICE   | ORIGINAL ESTIMATE | REVISED ESTIMATE  | FINAL OUTTURN     | VARIANCE        | ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE |                           |                    |                 |                 |
|   |                   |                   |                   |                 | Change in Recharges  | Change in Capital Charges | Change in Reserves | Major Variances | Minor Variances |
|   | £                 | £                 | £                 | £               |                      |                           |                    |                 |                 |
| Corporate Core  | 286,070           | 147,043           | 356,852           | 209,809         | 167,642              |                           | -21,288            | 41,900          | 21,555          |
| Legal and Democratic                                  | 1,196,670         | 1,258,718         | 1,174,811         | -83,907         | -8,655               |                           | 55,450             | -112,000        | -18,702         |
| Planning and Development                              | 1,242,420         | 1,294,251         | 1,320,807         | 26,556          | 33,048               |                           | 327,701            | -356,640        | 22,447          |
| Financial Services                                    | 2,052,430         | 2,127,005         | 1,755,288         | -371,717        | -112,711             |                           | 100,000            | -336,634        | -22,372         |
| ICT   | -2,520            | 64,685            | 16,395            | -48,290         | -29,568              |                           |                    | -19,105         | 383             |
| Housing General Fund                                  | 518,510           | 967,445           | 1,014,379         | 46,934          | 12,080               |                           | 64,004             | -19,419         | -9,731          |
| Environmental Services                                | 5,853,670         | 5,615,589         | 5,498,469         | -117,120        | -32,561              | -8,593                    | 134,310            | -188,000        | -22,276         |
| Cultural Services                                     | 2,894,300         | 2,431,342         | 2,266,126         | -165,216        | -145,722             | -51,667                   | 72,731             | -56,800         | 16,242          |
| Corporate Expenditure                                 | 1,888,360         | 2,143,028         | 2,645,018         | 501,990         | 30,290               |                           |                    | 444,460         | 27,240          |
| <b>NET SERVICE EXPENDITURE</b>                        | <b>15,929,910</b> | <b>16,049,106</b> | <b>16,048,145</b> | <b>-961</b>     | <b>-86,157</b>       | <b>-60,260</b>            | <b>732,908</b>     | <b>-602,238</b> | <b>14,786</b>   |
| AMRA  | -3,260,950        | -3,380,147        | -3,579,964        | -199,817        |                      | 60,260                    |                    | -260,077        | 0               |
| Concurrent Functions Grants and Drainage Board Levies | 272,680           | 272,680           | 272,680           | 0               |                      |                           |                    |                 | 0               |
| Transfer to/from Reserves                             | -80,880           | -80,880           | -97,455           | -16,575         | -15,901              |                           | -674               |                 | 0               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>12,860,760</b> | <b>12,860,759</b> | <b>12,643,406</b> | <b>-217,353</b> | <b>-102,058</b>      | <b>0</b>                  | <b>732,234</b>     | <b>-862,315</b> | <b>14,786</b>   |

## 5. Corporate Plan

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The Corporate Plan is a key planning document for the Council. It is intended to:

- Set out the council's priorities for the period 2007 – 10.
- Set out the key objectives that the council needs to deliver in order to achieve those priorities.
- Create a link between those priorities/objectives and the council's financial plans.
- Provide the context for detailed business planning by service areas (and individual teams).
- Allow clear objectives to be set for each member of staff so that everyone in the organisation knows what part they should be playing in fulfilling the council's objectives.
- Be the starting point for the Council's performance management arrangements. The various statutory and local Performance Indicators that we monitor monthly or quarterly should illustrate how well or badly the organisation is doing in fulfilling the objectives of the Corporate Plan and prompt corrective action where necessary.

The Corporate Plan is also closely linked to the Ashford Borough Community Strategy in that many of the themes of the Community Strategy reflect councillors' priorities and the Corporate Plan illustrates the contribution that the council itself is making to the implementation of the Community Strategy.

The Corporate Plan was revised during 2006/07. As part of this process the council commissioned a residents' survey from Ipsos MORI and the results from this survey provided the council with a view on the priorities of local people. The end result was a Corporate Plan that all members of the council agreed would represent our priorities for the period 2007 to 2010.

The full version of the Corporate Plan is set out on the next two pages.

## Corporate Plan 2007 - 2010

### Good quality services giving best value for money

By 2010 we will:

- Provide excellent services and good value for money.
- Provide top quality customer service and maintain high customer satisfaction levels.
- Protect the health of the community and address key health issues.
- Maintain the level of Council Tax as amongst the lowest in Kent.

### Local leadership and strong partnership working

By 2010 we will:

- Develop a new Sustainable Community Strategy to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.
- Tackle crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Provide more integrated and efficient services through effective partnership working.
- Improve the efficiency and speed for managing planning applications for major development sites.
- Engage young people to ensure services provided meet their needs and aspirations.

### Customer/Citizen focus

By 2010 we will:

- Improve communication with residents.
- Achieve and maintain accessibility standards for the Council's website.
- Improve opportunities for residents to influence the provision of council services.
- Finalise and implement a Social Inclusion Strategy with guidance on how to liaise with 'hard to reach' groups.
- Answer 88% of customer enquiries at first point of contact.
- Consult and gain feedback from those interested in helping to shape future planning and development issues in the Borough.

### Our Environment

By 2010 we will:

- Develop a new County-wide waste strategy and achieve national targets for the recycling/composting of municipal waste.
- Open a new Environment Centre adjacent to the Community Woodland at Singleton by 2008.
- Manage Ashford's network of green open spaces.
- Require that all new homes built in the Borough meet challenging standards in environmental sustainability.
- Ensure the management of water supply and waste water treatment meets the needs of the Borough's growing population.

## Ashford's Future

By 2010 we will:

- Adopt (by 2008) a Local Development Framework "Core Strategy" to govern the Borough's growth in the period to 2021.
- Maintain local democratic control over the nature, pace and quality of Ashford's growth.
- Transform Ashford town centre.
- Support a new Learning Campus in Ashford town centre.
- Implement the first stages of the Ashford Parking Strategy.
- Work with partners to bring forward a high quality and comprehensively planned area of shopping, offices, homes and leisure space along the Elwick Road corridor.

## Housing

By 2010 we will:

- Work with partners to provide 968 homes of excellent quality at an affordable cost to meet the range of housing needs within the community.
- Complete 75% of the regeneration works at Stanhope.
- Provide a tenant lead housing service to improve choice and satisfaction levels, deliver new services, retain decent homes standards and regenerate existing Council housing areas.
- Promote an effective housing service to reduce homelessness and temporary accommodation.

## Prosperity

By 2010 we will:

- Work with partners to attract good jobs and businesses to the area.
- Work with partners to bring forward the high speed train services to and from London.
- Improve private sector commercial development investment opportunities.
- Improve business productivity and sustainable business.
- Protect the character and viability of the rural areas of the Borough.
- Improve Ashford's streets and public spaces.

## 6. Comprehensive Performance Assessment

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Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the method by which Central Government assesses how well local authorities are performing. There are five possible rankings: poor, weak, fair, good and excellent. In 2003 Ashford Borough Council, in its first ever assessment was judged as being, 'a Good Council that is well placed to deliver further improvements'.

Building on this success and as a Council that strives for continuous improvement Ashford Borough Council is now aiming to achieve Excellent status under CPA. During 2007-2008 the Council will undertake benchmarking to assess its likelihood to be accepted for re-grading and intends to conduct a peer review to help inform upon the necessary actions that the Council will need to undertake to be re-graded as an excellent authority.

In order to implement improvements throughout the Council we introduced an Improvement Plan in May 2005 designed to improve ourselves as a Council and deliver the excellent services our residents deserve. In 2006 the Audit Commission agreed that the action plan had been implemented. In its place we have adopted a new Corporate Delivery Plan which will aid the Council in delivering the new Corporate Plan.

## 7. What Are Performance Indicators?

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All effective organisations measure their performance in order to know how well they are doing and to identify opportunities for improvement. Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are measures of performance set by Central Government against key delivery areas such as council tax collection and level of waste recycling which help us to monitor our performance.

Ashford Borough Council has also set a number of Local Performance Indicators (LPIs) which reflect our own priorities and services. These LPIs allow us to monitor and maintain high levels of service in areas that are important to the people of Ashford.

### 7.1 Summary of Performance

Measuring and reporting performance against BVPIs and LPIs allows us to act on the information to inform decision-making and to focus our resources. The use of performance indicators allows us to judge which services are performing well, those that are satisfactory and those that are performing poorly so that we can target, in the most resource effective way, those areas that need the most improvement.

There are currently 91 BVPI's and 69 LPIs. A summary of how the Council has performed in relation to our Performance Indicators for 2006/2007 is shown below

#### Best Value Performance Indicators:

- { 60% (46) of our BVPI results were on or above target
- { 40% (32) of our BVPI results did not reach target however, of these
- { 19% (6) were close to achieving target

#### Local Performance Indicators:

- { 53% (33) of our LPI results were on or above target
- { 47% (30) of our BVPI results did not reach target however, of these
- { 57% (17) were close to achieving target

The following sections will outline the performance of the Council's service areas over the past year, not only in terms of indicators and targets but also looking at past and current achievements and some future goals.

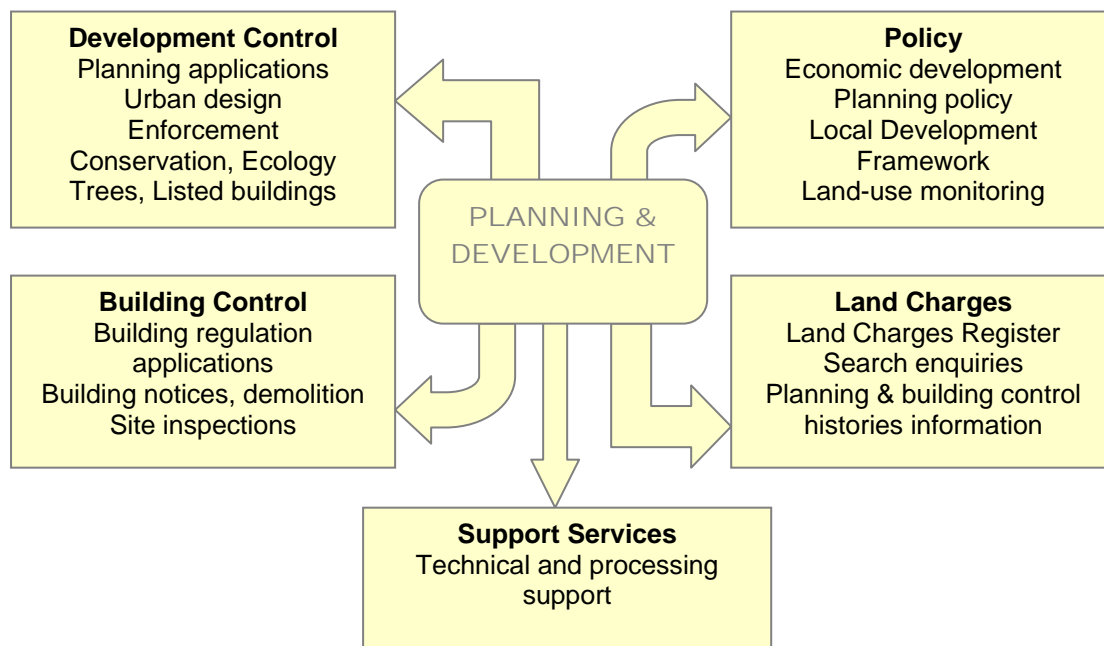
## 8. Service Information

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### 8.1 Planning & Development

#### What we do

All the varied work that the Planning & Development service does is directed towards creating a high quality environment to live and work in and importantly, the development of sustainable communities for the borough of Ashford. This drives everything that we do, from making sure that all development proposals are of the highest quality to promoting economic growth and job creation. Ashford has been selected by the Government as a major growth area which has created many major challenges but also some incredibly exciting opportunities as we work with partners and the Ashford's Future Delivery Team to plan for the Borough's future.



#### Past Achievements

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##### All In One Service

The previously separate Building Control, Land Charges and Support departments have been fully embedded into the Planning & Development service so that every element of the development process is handled in one unit. This means that everything from requesting a land charge search when buying a new house to obtaining a completion certificate for a major site development can be done with ease.

##### Income Generation

Both Building Control and Land Charges carry out fee-earning work and have a good market standing. This means that they are self funded activities rather than being paid for from Council Tax. The Building Control team ensures that buildings within the Borough are constructed to a safe standard and are continuously encouraging excellence within the construction industry. The Land Charges team provides a professional service for the co-ordination and processing of searches, assisting house buyers and sellers throughout the Borough and helps to ensure that their conveyancing transactions are not delayed.

##### Planning Applications

We have made steady improvements on all planning application handling targets and for the vast majority of cases we are well ahead of national targets. Our web-enabled planning service is achieving high ratings in national surveys and has received very positive customer feedback. We are

genuinely focused on customer care and responding to customer demand. As part of our commitment to our customers Planning & Development has setup a new team to deal with the high volume of correspondence and phone calls related to planning applications. This will also help to speed up the planning application process .

We have been working hard to move towards the national targets for major site developments, which is a challenge bearing in mind the number and complexity of such cases in Ashford and the limited resources available.

### Current Progress

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#### Local Development Framework (LDF)

The new LDF reached a key stage in November 2006 when the Core Strategy was formally submitted and responses invited before a local examination due in June 2007. The Core Strategy is the 'backbone' of the LDF and, as far as the Ashford growth area is concerned, it is the culmination of a thorough process of master planning for the town. It is also a key policy document for the rest of the Borough. A report outlining options for development in the town centre area has also been produced and was agreed in April 2006. Public consultation took place on this shortly afterwards. The LDF is an exceptionally important process for residents to participate in and major efforts have been made to work closely with groups representing all aspects of the Borough's community. In recognition of the Unit's innovative work in planning for sustainable growth in Ashford with the local community, the Council was formally recognised as Beacon Council for its work in March 2007 – one of only 4 in the country to receive this award.



#### Town Centre

We have been overseeing work on a Town Centre Master plan and detailed studies on the Victoria Way route. Preparations are well advanced to secure a development partner for the comprehensive regeneration of the Elwick Road area (working with SEEDA), to complement the major shopping scheme under construction at County Square and the works planned to turn the ring road into attractive tree-lined streets. The rejuvenation of Ashford town and surrounding public spaces will be kick-started by developing a mixed range of residential and retail uses

#### Handling applications on major Sites

Good progress has been made on the way we handle the biggest and most complex planning applications. Working with major developers we have developed a 'tool-kit' of good practice that is now being used to help produce better developments to a shorter timetable and providing greater certainty for the development industry. Community design workshops are an integral part of this way of working and are helping local people and organisations have more of a say about the shape of future developments. Recently our performance on handling major sites has reached and passed the Government's national target. Major schemes, such as the new Learning Campus and the related redevelopment of the existing college site, have been handled with all the proper attention to detail but in record time.

### Future Goals

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#### Design Standards

Sustainable development is all about meeting the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations and should be at the heart of everything we do. To encourage this more widely we want to set design and sustainability standards at the highest standard and will produce comprehensive planning guidance that sets out in detail how the challenging standards set in the Core Strategy will be met, for example, requirements for levels of renewable energy in new developments. We will continue to use community design workshops on key sites and as part of our Beacon Council status will help other Council's to benefit from what we have learnt.

#### Providing the facilities needed for a growing town

The Core Strategy also sets out proposals for an 'Ashford Tariff' on new developments to pay for

extra physical and community facilities needed to provide for the growth of the town as a whole. This is a groundbreaking new initiative that will help to make sure that essential infrastructure is in the right place at the right time when new housing is being developed. Guidance will be produced over the next year to help put this into practice.

### Town centre

This major project led by Kent County Council is now taking shape and work on the radical re-modelling of a large part of the ring road should be completed by late spring 2008. The marketing of the Elwick Road corridor and the Town Centre Action Plan will be rolled out in parallel with the ring road remodelling so that high standards of mixed-use buildings are matched by the quality of the surrounding streets and spaces. This is for the benefit of the Borough's residents but it will also help to engender business confidence in Ashford to sustain the growth in the town centre economy that will need to be sustained over a long period.

### Contact

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 01233 330239

### Planning & Development Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR      | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result         | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|----------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BV 106</b>  | Number of new homes built on previously developed land                    | 25.60%            | 94                | 17.78%                    | ✗              | 20.00%            | 20.00%            | 20.00%            |
| <b>BV 109a</b> | % of major applications determined within 13 weeks                        | 76.62%            | 70.00%            | 58.14%                    | ✓              | 74.90%            | 74.90%            | 74.90%            |
| <b>BV 109b</b> | % of minor applications determined within 8 weeks                         | 85.21%            | 76.00%            | 85.37%                    | ✓              | 81.07%            | 81.07%            | 81.07%            |
| <b>BV 109c</b> | % of 'other' applications determined within 8 weeks                       | 93.58%            | 88.00%            | 92.51%                    | ✓              | 91.39%            | 91.39%            | 91.39%            |
| <b>BV 111</b>  | Satisfaction with planning service by those making a planning application | 62%               | n/a               | 71%<br>(2003-2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 200a</b> | Local Development Scheme (LDS) produced by March 2005                     | Yes               | Yes               | Yes                       | ✓              | Yes               | Yes               | Yes               |
| <b>BV 200b</b> | Milestones set out in LDS met?  | Yes               | Yes               | Yes                       | ✓              | Yes               | Yes               | Yes               |
| <b>BV 200c</b> | Annual monitoring report published by December last year                  | Yes               | Yes               | Yes                       | ✓              | Yes               | Yes               | Yes               |
| <b>BV 204</b>  | % of appeal decisions allowed against refusal of planning applications    | 23.53%            | 25.00%            | 34.5%                     | ✓              | 40.00%            | 40.00%            | 40.00%            |

| INDICATOR      | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|----------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BV 205</b>  | Score against 'quality of planning services' checklist         | 100%              | 88.90%            | 94.40%            | ✓              | 94.40%            | 94.40%            | 94.40%            |
| <b>BV 219a</b> | Number of conservation areas                                   | 43                | 43                | 43                | n/a            | 43                | 43                | 43                |
| <b>BV 219b</b> | % of conservation areas with an up-to-date character appraisal | 0%                | 30.23%            | 0%                | ✗              | 32.56%            | 41.86%            | 51.16%            |
| <b>BV 219c</b> | % of conservation areas with published management proposals    | 0%                | 30.23%            | 0%                | ✗              | 32.56%            | 41.86%            | 51.16%            |

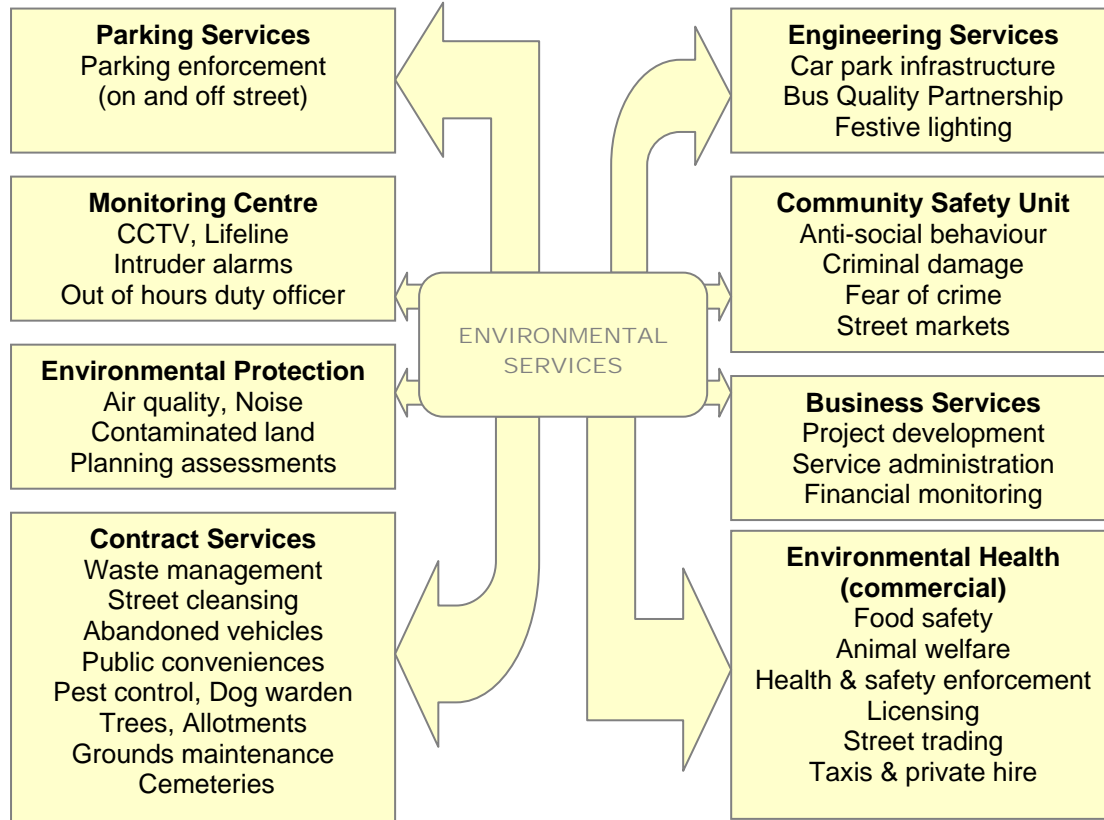
## Local Performance indicators

| INDICATOR    | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|--------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BC1</b>   | % of plans checked on time  | 89.44%            | 100%              | 92.00%            | ✗              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| <b>BC3</b>   | % letters answered within 10 working days   | 75.38%            | 100%              | 64.69%            | ✗              | 80%               | 80%               | 80%               |
| <b>BC 4a</b> | % of full plans acknowledged in 3 working days  | 93.06%            | 80%               | New               | ✓              | 80%               | 80%               | 80%               |
| <b>BC 4b</b> | % of full plans acknowledged in 5 working days  | 95.80%            | 100%              | New               | ✗              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| <b>BC 5</b>  | Building notices acknowledged in 2 days   | 76.98%            | 100%              | New               | ✗              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| <b>SP3</b>   | Average density of new housing on major developments granted planning permission against target | 36%               | 30%               | 30%               | n/a            | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>SP4</b>   | Number of homes for which planning permission is granted during the year                        | 534               | 800               | 2095              | n/a            | deleted           |                   |                   |

## 8.2 Environmental Services

### What Do We Do?

Environmental Services is a very diverse group of services which, together, compose a large proportion of the 'front line' services of the Council.



### Past Achievements

#### A Cleaner Borough

Environmental Services has continued to build on the recommendations made in the scrutiny reviews on Play Areas, Anti-Social Behaviour and Tidiness of the Borough. Partnerships and publicity featured highly in these reviews; activities ranging from offenders on probation using the Grime Buster to remove graffiti, to teams assisting on weed control and other cleansing issues. A hotline was established to make it easier to report anything from abandoned vehicles, street litter, fly tipping and vandalism to discarded syringes and damaged or missing street name plates. This can be done on: [http://www.ashford.gov.uk/health\\_and\\_safety/vandalism\\_and\\_littering/litter.aspx](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/health_and_safety/vandalism_and_littering/litter.aspx) or by telephoning 01233 330535.

#### Current Progress

##### Clean Neighbourhoods

Under the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act, the Council now has powers to deal with a range of anti-social activities, such as littering. Our aim is to educate people, where possible, not to drop litter and, although we have exercised these powers on several occasions, our philosophy is to encourage people to care for their communities and not to spoil them with litter and general rubbish. The same legislation gives us more powers to remove abandoned vehicles, enabling us to remove them before they are set fire to or become vandalised.

### Tree Management Policy

The Council's first guide to its Tree Management Policy was published during 2006-2007. Called 'Tree Works', it's a handy leaflet giving useful information on the works that we will undertake on our trees, the suitability of different types of tree 'operations' for various problems and, just as important, what we don't carry out. This is to help the public find their way round the complex issue of tree management. Copies are available from the [greenteam@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:greenteam@ashford.gov.uk), on our website at [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk) or from the Tree Officer on 012333 330206 or 330303.



### Monitoring Centre

During 2006 the 'Lifeline' service was re-launched and re-branded as 'Telecare'. The Monitoring Centre held a conference for healthcare professionals at the Ashford International Hotel, to demonstrate the wide range of facilities that are now available to help vulnerable people remain in their own homes. A pilot scheme for Telecare has been running with KCC's Social Services: this will be extended over the coming year to include raising awareness with GP services.

### Environmental Health

During the year we have been preparing for the implementation of Smoke Free legislation and the Gambling Act, as well as the continuation of support for businesses with the implementation of the new hygiene laws. For food the Environmental Health team are preparing for 'Scores on the Doors' going 'live'. This is the publication of Food Hygiene Standards of Food Businesses which, from October this year, will be available on both the Council's website and on a national website. Details will be given later in the year.

As part of our contaminated land responsibilities we secured funding from DEFRA to assist with detailed investigation on an old contaminated site; and the ever increasing volume of environmental nuisance complaints has meant more work on noise, smells, drainage and contaminated land.

### Parking

Our work on Parking Reviews has continued in Tenterden, while the Ashford review plans have now been implemented. A lot of preparation is being carried out to implement the first stages of the approved Parking Strategy and work continues to start progressing schemes. An ABC initiative has led to nearly all Councils in Kent agreeing to conform to policies set out to provide guidance in connection with the issue and cancellation of parking Penalty Charge Notices. Website guidance policies ensure that motorists are always dealt with in a consistently fair way throughout Kent. Significant interest in the initiative is being shown by authorities across the country and it is hoped more councils will adopt and conform to the policies in the future.

Although the activities of the Council's Parking Attendants most often come to public attention in a negative way, it is only very rarely that recognition of all the good and positive work they do on a daily basis comes to attention. However this was not the case recently when one of the Council's Parking Attendants was rewarded with a Certificate of Merit for the Courage he showed for his determination to protect the public near the scene of a town centre incident earlier this year.

### Future Goals

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#### Domestic Waste Strategy

Domestic Waste collection remains a high profile service especially with increasing nationally discussions on fortnightly collections and concern locally over KCC's removal of 'bring' facilities for plastics collections.

Refuse collection in the borough will remain weekly and we continue to work on initiatives to increase recycling and to develop new ways of dealing with household waste. We shall continue to develop these ideas over the next few months in consultation with the public.

### Community Safety

Crime statistics remain relatively low for Ashford, and over the past year more Police Community Support Officers have been recruited (now totalling 8) who work closely with all the partners of the Community Safety Unit to help prevent anti-social behaviour and rural and urban crime. This number will be doubled during the summer of 2007. Representatives of partner organisations based at the CSU at the Old Police Station in Tufton Street are increasing; and closer working between all partners – including KCC's Wardens – enables better coverage of the borough.

A 'Safety In Action' week is planned for June 2007, where year 6 primary school children will learn about safety for themselves and for others. With interactive workshops being held by the Fire Service, the Police, the CSU, Environmental Health, and many others, children will learn about the dangers around them and how to look after themselves.

### Future Work

Overall 2006/07 was a good year, achieving most of what we wanted - while still remaining under budget. Each year, however, the challenge for us, in meeting the needs of a rapidly expanding borough, gets harder to manage; we need to work with our partners and the public to find new ways of tackling issues such as reducing household waste collection, increasing recycling, educating businesses and the public, and taking enforcement action where education fails to produce results. We continue to work in partnership to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime, and acknowledge the support we receive from all the agencies involved.

### Contact

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 01233 330518

### Environmental Services Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR       | DESCRIPTION                               | 2006/07 Result | 2006/07 Target | 2005/06 Result | Target met? | 2007/08 Target | 2008/09 Target | 2009/10 Target |
|-----------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>BV 82ai</b>  | % of household waste sent for recycling   | 14.33%*        | 19%            | 14.99%         | ✘           | 17%            | 20%            | 23%            |
| <b>BV 82aii</b> | Total tonnage of waste sent for recycling | 6499.48*       | 7,215.72       | 6,086.27       | ✔           | 6,500kg        | 7,000kg        | 8,000kg        |
| <b>BV 82bi</b>  | % of household waste sent for composting  | 5.15%*         | 3%             | 3.77%          | ✔           | 5%             | 6%             | 7%             |

| INDICATOR | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result         | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|-----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| BV 82bii  | Total tonnage of waste sent for composting                                     | 2,334.18*         | 1,352.95          | 1,529.19                  | ✓              | 2,000kg           | 2,500kg           | 3,000kg           |
| BV 84a    | Number of kilograms of waste collected per head                                | 412.41kg*         | 425kg             | 377.1                     | ✓              | 393.6kg           | 393.6kg           | 393.6kg           |
| BV 84b    | % change in waste collected per head   | 9.39%*            | 0%                | -8.89%                    | ✓              | -3.74%            | -3.74%            | -3.74%            |
| BV 86     | Cost of waste collection per household   | £42.56            | £39.29            | £40.45                    | ✗              | £39.48            | £39.48            | £39.48            |
| BV 89     | Satisfaction with cleanliness of the borough by residents                      | 70%               | n/a               | 57%<br>(2003-2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | 70%               |
| BV 90a    | Satisfaction of residents with waste collection service                        | 83%               | n/a               | 88%<br>(2003-2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | 83%               |
| BV 90b    | Satisfaction of residents with waste recycling facilities                      | 68%               | n/a               | 69%                       | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | 69%               |
| BV 91a    | % of population with kerbside collection of one recyclable                     | 54.88%            | 100%              | 82.1%                     | ✗              | 58%               | 62%               | 66%               |
| BV 91b    | % of population with kerbside collection of at least two recyclables           | 54.88%            | 53.30%            | 82.1%                     | ✓              | 58%               | 62%               | 66%               |
| BV 126    | Domestic burglaries per 1000 households  | 7.45              | 6.9               | 9.3                       | ✗              | 6.4               | 6.4               | 6.4               |
| BV 127a   | Violent crimes per 1000 population   | 15.77             | 16.2              | 16.3                      | ✓              | 12.4              | 12.4              | 12.4              |
| BV 127b   | Robberies per 1000 population  | 0.85              | 0.62              | 0.6                       | ✗              | 0.3               | 0.3               | 0.3               |
| BV 128    | Vehicle crimes per 1000 population   | 9.0               | 7.7               | 8.2                       | ✗              | 7.3               | 7.3               | 7.3               |
| BV 166a   | Score against checklist for environmental health / trading standards checklist | 94.15%            | 97%               | 94.2%                     | ✗              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| BV 199a   | % land and highways with unacceptable litter                                   | 8.87%             | 11%               | 11.8%                     | ✓              | 8.8%              | 8.8%              | 8.8%              |
| BV 199b   | % land and highways with unacceptable graffiti                                 | 2.90%             | 8%                | 3%                        | ✓              | 1%                | 1%                | 1%                |
| BV 199c   | % land and highways with unacceptable fly-posting                              | 0.28%             | 2%                | 1%                        | ✓              | 0%                | 0%                | 0%                |
| BV 199d   | Reduction of fly-tipping   | Awaiting result*  |                   |                           |                |                   |                   |                   |
| BV 216a   | Number of sites  | 1073              | 1073              | 1073                      | n/a            | 1073              | 1073              | 1073              |

| INDICATOR      | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|----------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                | with land contamination concerns  |                   |                   |                   |                |                   |                   |                   |
| <b>BV 216b</b> | Contaminated Land: % of sites that details are known to decide whether to take action | 2%                | 2%                | 2%                | ✓              | 8%                | 8%                | 8%                |
| <b>BV 217</b>  | % of pollution control improvements to existing installations completed on time       | 100%              | 90%               | 97%               | ✓              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| <b>BV 218a</b> | % of abandoned vehicles reported that were investigated within 24 hours               | 82.50%            | 82.50%            | Not recorded      | ✓              | 85%               | 87.5%             | 90%               |
| <b>BV 218b</b> | % of abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours of being legally entitled to do so    | 92.00%            | 92.00%            | Not recorded      | ✓              | 94%               | 95%               | 96%               |
| <b>BV 225</b>  | Actions against domestic violence   | 63.60%            | 36.40%            | 27.3%             | ✓              | 65%               | 67.5%             | 70%               |

\* estimated results – awaiting final results provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Local Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR   | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|-------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>HT1</b>  | % increase in number of visitors to pay and display car parks   | -2.40%            | 1%                | 10.80%            | ×              | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>HT2</b>  | Number of car parking spaces for disabled people per 100 spaces | 5%                | 6%                | 5.00              | ×              | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>HT3a</b> | Penalty Charge Notices issued per 1000 population               | 12.04             | 12.5              | 14.40             | ✓              | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>HT3b</b> | % Penalty Charge Notices subject to appeal to NPAS              | 0.17%             | 1%                | 0.07%             | ✓              | 1%                | 1%                | 1%                |
| <b>HT3c</b> | % appeals which were successful to NPAS                         | 50%               | 35%               | 10.35%            | ×              | 33%               | 30%               | 28%               |
| <b>HT3d</b> | % of Penalty Charge Notices cancelled                           | 22.32%            | 18%               | 18.50%            | ×              | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>E1a</b>  | % of life safety alarms responded to in 30 seconds              | 96.77%            | 85%               | 96.71%            | ✓              | 85%               | 85%               | 85%               |
| <b>E1b</b>  | % of life safety alarms responded to in 60 seconds              | 98.35%            | 99%               | 98.36%            | ×              | 99%               | 99%               | 99%               |

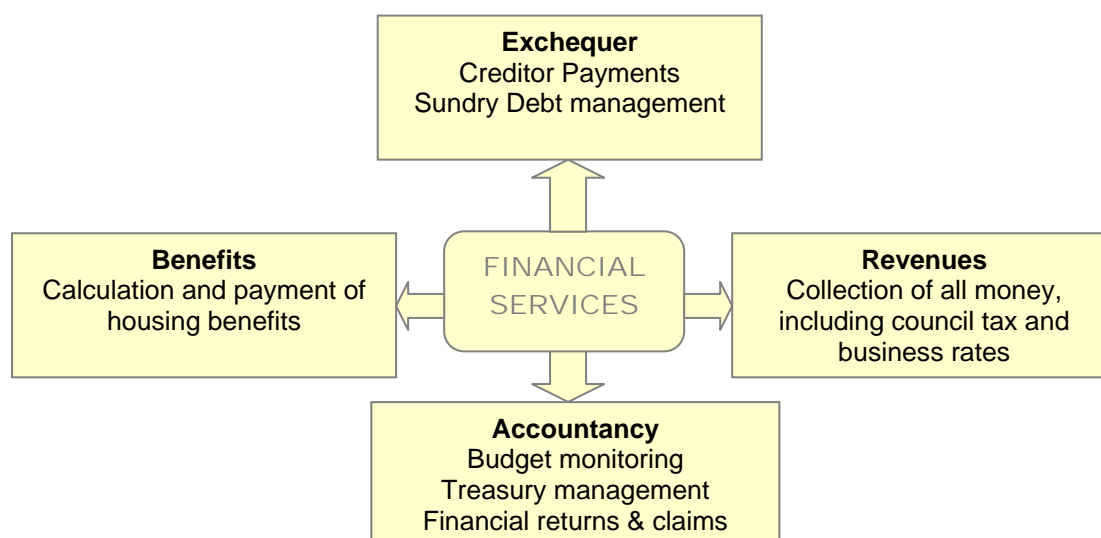
|            |  |        |      |        |   |         |      |      |
|------------|--|--------|------|--------|---|---------|------|------|
| <b>E1c</b> | % of life other alarms responded to in 90 seconds              | 98.21% | 85%  | 98.92% | ✓ | 85%     | 85%  | 85%  |
| <b>E1d</b> | % of life other alarms responded to in 180 seconds             | 99.26% | 99%  | 99.62% | ✓ | 99%     | 99%  | 99%  |
| <b>E2</b>  | % completion of annual food inspection programme               | 99.74% | 100% | 100%   | × | deleted |      |      |
| <b>E3</b>  | Number of dog fouling complaints                               | 54     | 27   | 36     | × | 27      | 25   | 23   |
| <b>E4</b>  | % of environmental pollution complaints responded to in 3 days | 97.80% | 100% | 98.00% | × | 100%    | 100% | 100% |

## 8.3 Financial Services

### What Do We Do?

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Financial Services is responsible for the management of all financial matters for the Council, from internal budgetary control and compliance through to collecting money owed to the Council and making payment of monies owed by the Council. By ensuring that money is used carefully and to the maximum potential, Financial Services helps the Council to maintain its commitment to keeping the low level of council tax that Ashford's residents currently enjoy.



### Past Achievements

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#### Efficiency Savings

The main areas of saving during the year were from the implementation of a new Temporary Staffing contract and savings on mobile phones and other ICT systems. The final efficiency saving outturn will be available from mid-July.

#### Current Progress

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#### Invoicing

During 2006/2007 we introduced new payment terms throughout the Council as well as introducing Banks Automated Clearing (BACs) payments for housing benefits. These changes have led to almost 96% of undisputed invoices being paid on time

#### Fraud

During 2006/2007 the Council continued to target benefit fraud. A total of 23 cautions and 5 administrative penalties were issued and 6 prosecutions were undertaken.

#### Consultation

We have been consulting widely with stakeholders to improve the financial information we provide. The ultimate goal of this process will be to produce financial data that is transparent and easy to understand.

#### Payment Dates

During the year we introduced a new payment date (1<sup>st</sup> of the month) for business rates and council tax. This has led to an improved cash flow for the Council and improved collection rates for both.

## Future Goals

### Invoicing (Part 2)

As part of striving for continuous improvement we will be introducing further improvements to our invoicing process during 2007-2008. These improvements will see the Council move to a completely electronic invoice processing service which will greatly improve our efficiency in dealing and paying invoices,

### Local Housing Allowance

From April 2008 changes to the way housing benefit is calculated will be introduced for new claimants. We will be working hard to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements to ensure that new claimants are not disadvantaged by the new regulations.



### Contact

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## Financial Services Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR     | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|---------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BV 8</b>   | % of invoices paid within 30 days                                | 95.91%            | 95.94%            | 94.68%            | ✘              | 96.71%            | 96.71%            | 96.71%            |
| <b>BV 9</b>   | % of council tax collected monthly                               | 98.31%            | 98.30%            | 97.97%            | ✔              | 98.40%            | 98.40%            | 98.40%            |
| <b>BV 10</b>  | % of non-domestic rates collected                                | 99.17%            | 99.14%            | 98.69%            | ✔              | 99.26%            | 99.26%            | 99.26%            |
| <b>BV 76a</b> | Number of housing benefit claimants visited per 1000 caseload    | 220.63            | 282               | 298.16            | n/a            |                   | deleted           |                   |
| <b>BV 76b</b> | Number of fraud investigators employed per 1000 caseload         | 0.40              | 0.40              | 0.41              | n/a            | 0.40              | 0.40              | 0.40              |
| <b>BV 76c</b> | Number of fraud investigations carried out per 1000 caseload     | 31.74             | 53.40             | 36.30             | n/a            | 27                | 27                | 27                |
| <b>BV 76d</b> | Number of benefit prosecutions per 1000 caseload                 | 4.52              | 5.31              | 9.79              | n/a            | 5.31              | 5.31              | 5.31              |
| <b>BV 78a</b> | Average processing time for new benefit claims in days           | 32.4              | 29.40             | 31.1              | ✘              | 26.4              | 26.4              | 26.4              |
| <b>BV 78b</b> | Average processing time for change in circumstance notifications | 6.6               | 7.4               | 10.4              | ✔              | 9.1               | 9.1               | 9.1               |

| INDICATOR        | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result         | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BV 79a</b>    | Accuracy of processing benefit claims                               | 97.20             | 99.00             | 94.60%                    | ✗              | 99.00%            | 99.00%            | 99.00%            |
| <b>BV 79bi</b>   | % of recoverable overpayments recovered                             | 80.77%            | 49.93%            | 57.68%                    | ✓              | 79.39%            | 79.39%            | 79.39%            |
| <b>BV 79bii</b>  | % of recoverable overpayments recovered: Outstanding and identified | 37.33%            | 40%               | 37.87%                    | ✓              | 39.69%            | 39.69%            | 39.69%            |
| <b>BV 79biii</b> | % of recoverable overpayments recovered: Written Off                | 1.38%             | 5%                | 0.90%                     | ✓              | 5.00%             | 5.00%             | 5.00%             |
| <b>BV 80a</b>    | Satisfaction with benefits service: contact with the office         | 71%               | n/a               | 78%<br>(2003/2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 80b</b>    | Satisfaction with the benefits service: service in the office       | 76%               | n/a               | 81%<br>(2003/2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 80c</b>    | Satisfaction with the benefits service: telephone service           | 62%               | n/a               | 64%<br>(2003/2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 80d</b>    | Satisfaction with the benefits service: staff in the office         | 76%               | n/a               | 81%<br>(2003/2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 80e</b>    | Satisfaction with the benefits service: forms                       | 54%               | n/a               | 54%<br>(2003/2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 80f</b>    | Satisfaction with the benefits service: speed of service            | 64%               | n/a               | 62%<br>(2003/2004 result) | n/a            | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |

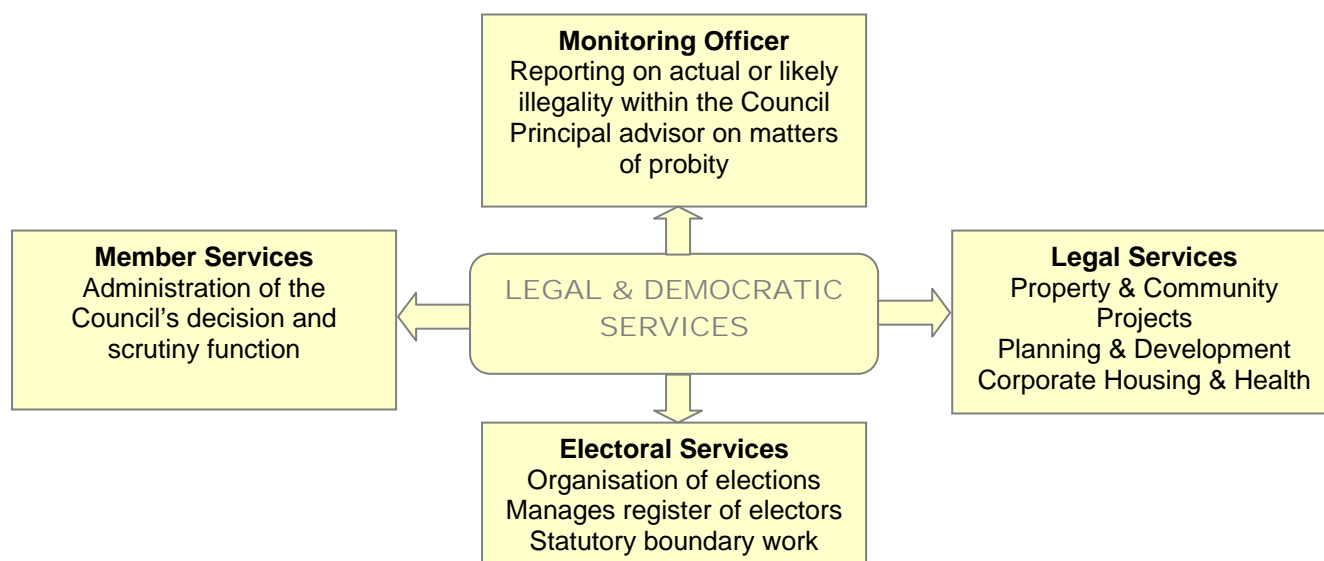
## Local Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR  | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>RB1</b> | Cost of administering a council tax account           | £13.50            | £16.00            | £14.40            | ✓              | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>RB2</b> | Cost of administering a benefits claim                | £80.00            | £95               | £75.00            | ✓              | deleted           |                   |                   |
| <b>RB3</b> | % of correspondence replied to within 15 working days | 90.60%            | 92%               | 80.00%            | ✗              | 92.00%            | 92.00%            | 92.00%            |
| <b>RB4</b> | % of sundry debtor income collected                   | 91.52%            | 94.00%            | 85.75%            | ✗              | 94.00%            | 94.50%            | 95.00%            |

## 8.4 Legal & Democratic Services

### What we do

This service is made up of two sections. The Legal team are legal and business advisors to the Council as a corporate body and to all front-line services individually. The Democratic Services team support the democratic and decision-making processes of the Council. This includes working with councillors (elected members) and all election related administration. In April 2006, the Ombudsman complaints and Overview & Scrutiny support functions transferred to this team to take advantage of the synergy between their work. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services is the Council's statutory Monitoring Officer.



### Past Achievements

#### Licensing and Gambling Acts

Successful joint working with Environmental Services means that the 24 hour liquor licensing responsibilities which the Council was required to take over in 2005 have been introduced smoothly and without any problems. Thanks to hard work from everybody involved no additional resources were required and all hearings with councillors on the decision panel were carried out as scheduled. Work arising from the introduction of the Gambling Act will also be dealt with from within existing resources.

#### Community Partnership Group

This Group has been constituted and has a broad remit to be supportive of other service providers and partnerships within the Borough

#### Online Publication

Member Services have saved £10,000 so far by publishing committee agendas, reports and minutes online. This has also made the democratic side of the Council more accessible to members of the public. This is being further enhanced by enabling people to register via our website to speak at meetings. This flexibility has increased participation. The Council Constitution is available online thereby encouraging more people to view it.

#### Major Projects

Junction 10 interim scheme improvements – the Council's legal services team led the production of all

the necessary legal documents to secure the developer funding arrangements for this £7m scheme

### Elections

Administering elections is a huge job and we were very busy with the parliamentary elections, Kent County Council elections, a ward by-election and three parish elections. Voter turnout increased and to encourage this further the personal canvass to houses will be reintroduced in 2006/07.



### Current Progress

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#### Audit Committee

During 2006/7 the terms of reference of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Selection and Constitutional Review Committees were reviewed and certain functions were removed and given to the Audit Committee which was constituted and had its first meeting prior to Christmas 2006. The purpose of an Audit Committee is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the Authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Authority's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, and to oversee the financial reporting process (Minute No. 408/12/06 refers).

#### Major Projects

There are major ongoing projects that we have supported including completion of the legal agreement for the County Square extension, progressing the Stanhope PFI to preferred bidder status and the registering of Tenterden Leisure Centre as a charity to achieve VAT savings.

#### Development Agreements

The volume of this work continues to increase and the number of Section 106 Agreements related to new housing and commercial developments is at an all time high. Complex negotiations are being concluded with the Barracks developers, the developers of the Eureka site and several others. The completion of legal agreements have also been carried out relating to the Park Farm South and East development, including the funding of Junction 10 interim scheme on the M20, and Cheeseman's Green.

#### Member Training

Individual Member training assessments are being developed to ensure that Members have the necessary skills to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively

### Elections

Preparing for the 2007 elections by undertaking a parish polling district review and also getting ready for the new Electoral Administration Bill which will introduce major changes including, new security measures for postal votes, verification of personal data and new procedures at polling stations.

## Future Goals

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### Member Allowances

The Independent Members Remuneration Panel will be convened in January 2008 to review the existing level of special responsibility allowances and also basic allowances payable to Members.

### Elections

Ensuring successful running of the 2007 Borough and Parish Council elections

### Major Projects

Continued support for a growing number of corporate and development related projects, including specific major development schemes, Ashford's Future projects, Local Development Framework strategy, finalisation of Stanhope PFI and Better Homes PFI legal documentation

### Monitoring Officer

Introduction of and training upon a new code of conduct for Councillors and preparations for the introduction in 2008 of a new ethical framework strategy involving local filtering, investigation and determination of all code of conduct complaints

## Contact

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## Legal & Democratic Services Performance Indicators

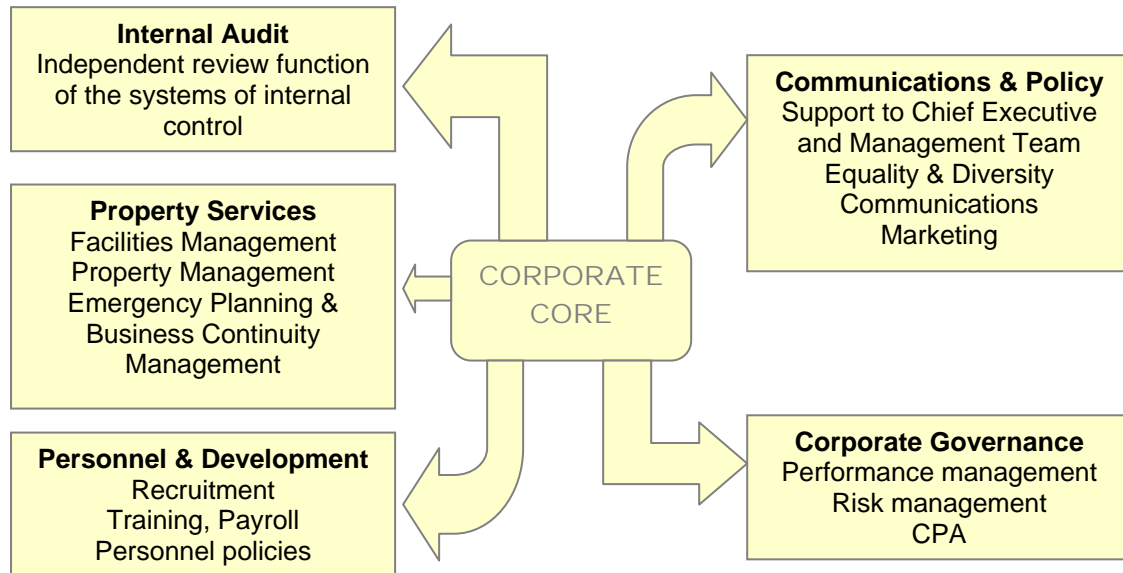
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| INDICATOR | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|-----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| LDS3a     | % of Executive meeting minutes published within 3 working days | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              | ✓              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| LDS3b     | % of Non-executive minutes published within 5 working days     | 98.65%            | 95%               | 95.88%            | ✓              | 95%               | 95%               | 95%               |
| LDS5      | Income for legal services                                      | £137,543          | £103,840          | £170,967          | ✓              | £103,840          | £103,840          | £103,840          |

## 8.5 Corporate Core

### What Do We Do?

The Corporate Core assists other services in the Council to deliver service and corporate objectives. This includes supporting the Senior Management Team in providing strategic direction for the authority as a whole and enabling the rest of the organisation to operate more effectively and respond quickly to new challenges. The Corporate Core consists of the following sections:



### Past Achievements

#### Beacon Status

In March 2005 Ashford Borough Council won Beacon status for its asset management. . Since winning this coveted award we have shared good practice with other authorities through meetings, conferences and open days. Further funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government has allowed us to continue this work through peer support activities that assist councils looking to improve their asset management performance.

#### Marketing & Communications

Following a review in 2005 the Communication and Marketing Service merged with the Corporate Policy unit. This merger will allow the Council to communicate more efficiently new Council policies and improve our ability to consult with the public on major policy issues.

### Current Progress

#### Revised Web Site

Following almost 12 months of major development the Council launched its newly designed web site. The new design has provided a much need facelift to the old site and has greatly improved its appearance, accessibility and usability. The new site is now far more user friendly and the ability to search the site for information has been greatly enhanced. The web site now conforms with the World Wide Web Consortiums 3(aaa) priority level standard on web site accessibility.

### Ashford Brand

In November Ashford launched a new brand 'Ashford Best Placed in Britain'. The brand development was part funded by the council and will be used to promote Ashford and the wealth of benefits it has to offer. The brand was developed and tested through extensive research and consultation with local businesses, residents, local and regional development agencies and host of other stakeholders.



### Corporate Property

An updated and refreshed 3 year property strategy has been approved & published on the Council's web site. The strategy deals with a wide ranging set of issues such as our asset management plan, energy policy, management of operational and non-operational properties and the sale of land.

### My Portal

During the year the Council rolled out My Portal, an on-line electronic database originally designed to manage training needs throughout the Council. The scope of the system has been greatly enhanced and enlarged since this original concept and the system now provides management of directory details, annual leave, sickness, training records and needs and timesheets.

### Internal Audit

The Council's audit partnership with Maidstone Borough Council has now become firmly embedded within the Council, with demonstrable improvements in effectiveness. The creation of the Audit Committee during 2006/07 has provided an improved forum for internal control and audit issues to be considered. During 2007-2008, Internal Audit will continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service provided to its clients. As an example, a recent initiative has been to introduce a customer satisfaction questionnaire for each audit project, allowing the quality of individual audit projects to be monitored from the client's perspective.

### Service Training

To support the Council in delivering the new Corporate Plan we have launched a council wide review of training requirements. This review has led to the development of comprehensive service training plans. These plans will ensure that each service areas has the necessary workforce skills in place to be able to deliver the individual service plans.

### Future Goals

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#### Shared Services

We will continue to look at opportunities to share services with other authorities. Working with other authorities offers the potential to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in the way the Council delivers its services.

#### Corporate Property

The development of Business Continuity Plans for all Council services is nearing completion and these plans will increase the Council's resilience in the event of a major incident causing disruption to the Council's critical functions. In addition the results from a suitability assessment of the Council's operational properties will be used to inform an action plan for improvements, disposal and/or acquisitions of property.

#### Investors in People


The Council will be working towards re-accreditation under the Investors in People framework. Since gaining Investor in People status in 2000 a new standard has been developed which places more emphasis upon planning and evaluation, management capability, employee engagement and effective learning and development.

### Communications Strategy



In March 2007 the Council agreed a new Communications Strategy which will be rolled out during 2007-2008. The strategy aims to raise the profile and protect and promote the reputation of the borough and improve communication with residents and stakeholders. It also looks to develop staff communication both internally and externally and deliver cost savings on the communication work we undertake.

### Contact

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## Corporate Core Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR     | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result  | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target                    | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|---------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BV 2a</b>  | The Level of the Equality Standard ABC achieves for race, gender and disability. (1-5, 5 is best) | 1                 | 2                 | 1                  | ✗              | 2                                    | 2                 | 3                 |
| <b>BV 2b</b>  | Quality of ABC race equality scheme.<br>Checklist system<br>-Number out of 19 shown as a %        | 26.32%            | 74%               | 26.32%             | ✗              | 30%                                  | 35%               | 40%               |
| <b>BV 3</b>   | Overall satisfaction of residents with the Council  | 47%               | n/a               | 51%<br>(2003/2004) | n/a            | Every 3 years                        |                   | tbc               |
| <b>BV 4</b>   | Satisfaction of residents with complaint handling by the Council                                  | 29%               | n/a               | 29%<br>(2003/2004) | n/a            | Every 3 years                        |                   | tbc               |
| <b>BV 11a</b> | Percentage of Top paid 5% of ABC staff who are women  | 30.00%            | 40.28%            | 30.00%             | ✗              | 30.00%                               | 30.00%            | 30.00%            |
| <b>BV 11b</b> | Percentage of Top paid 5% of ABC staff from an Ethnic Minority                                    | 0%                | 3.39%             | 0%                 | ✗              | 1%                                   | 1%                | 1%                |
| <b>BV 11c</b> | Percentage of Top paid 5% of ABC staff who class themselves as disabled                           | 6.70%             | 9.00%             | 8.50%              | ✗              | 4.83%                                | 4.83%             | 4.83%             |
| <b>BV 12</b>  | Working days lost due to sickness (average days per FTE)  | 7.68              | 8.40              | 7.15               | ✓              | 8.34                                 | 8.34              | 8.34              |
| <b>BV 14</b>  | Early retirement rate (excl ill health)   | 0.46%             | 0.19%             | 0%                 | ✗              | 0.17%                                | 0.17%             | 0.17%             |
| <b>BV 15</b>  | Early retirement rate - ill health only   | 0%                | 0.15%             | 0%                 | ✓              | 0.10%                                | 0.10%             | 0.10%             |
| <b>BV 16a</b> | % Employees declaring Disability  | 3.08%             | 3.74%             | 3.74%              | ✗              | 3.89%                                | 3.89%             | 3.89%             |
| <b>BV 16b</b> | % Economically active population (age 18-64) who have a disability                                | 10.45%            | n/a               | 10.45%             | n/a            | Provides comparative data for BV 16a |                   |                   |
| <b>BV 17a</b> | % Employees from an ethnic minority   | 1.93%             | 4.60%             | 2.00%              | ✗              | 1.10%                                | 1.10%             | 1.10%             |
| <b>BV 17b</b> | % Economically active (age 18-64) ethnic minority people in                                       | 1.10%             | n/a               | 1.1%               | n/a            | Provides comparative data for BV 17a |                   |                   |

|               |  |        |        |        |     |                                      |        |        |
|---------------|--|--------|--------|--------|-----|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|
|               | the borough  |        |        |        |     |                                      |        |        |
| <b>BV 156</b> | % of Council buildings that are accessible for disabled people   | 66.67% | 70.58% | 66.67% | ✘   | 70.58%                               | 70.58% | 70.58% |
| <b>BV 174</b> | Number of Racial Incidents (where ABC has some direct involvement) reported to ABC and recorded per 100,000 population | 5.57   | n/a    | 1.85   | n/a | Provides comparative data for BV 175 |        |        |
| <b>BV 175</b> | Racial Incidents reported to ABC that are followed up  | 100%   | 100%   | 100%   | ✓   | 100%                                 | 100%   | 100%   |

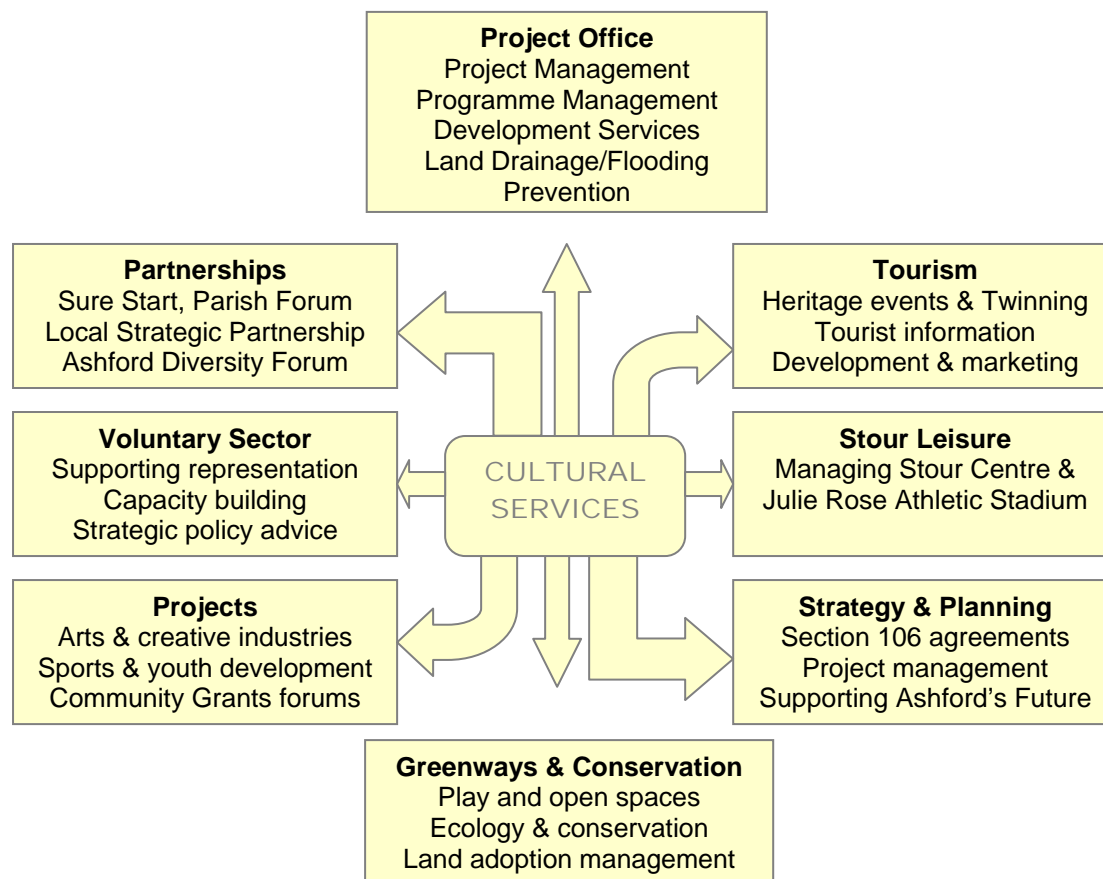
Local performance Indicators

| INDICATOR        | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07 Result | 2006/07 Target | 2005/06 Result | Target met? | 2007/08 Target | 2008/09 Target | 2009/10 Target |
|------------------|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>A 1</b>       | % of audit reports completed against plan                    | 87.10%         | 100%           | New in 06/07   | ✘           | 80%            | 82.50%         | 85%            |
| <b>A 2</b>       | % of chargeable time achieved (time spent on audit plan)     | 65.46%         | 75%            | New in 06/07   | ✘           | 75%            | 75%            | 75%            |
| <b>A 3</b>       | Internal audits % variation from time allocated              | 29.89%         | 20%            | New 06/07      | ✘           | deleted        |                |                |
| <b>CH 1a</b>     | Resignation rate of non-managerial posts                     | 11.75%         | 10%            | 3.58%          | ✘           | 10%            | 10%            | 10%            |
| <b>CH 1b</b>     | Resignation rate of managerial posts                         | 0.98%          | 4%             | 0.48%          | ✓           | 4%             | 4%             | 4%             |
| <b>P&amp;D 3</b> | Cost of overtime (as a percentage of wage bill)              | 1.04%          | 1%             | 1.12%          | ✘           | 1%             | 1%             | 1%             |
| <b>PS 12</b>     | % of total income received for council commercial properties | 98.00%         | 90%            | New 06/07      | ✓           | deleted        |                |                |

## 8.6 Cultural and Project Services

### What Do We Do?

Cultural and Project Services meet the leisure and cultural needs for the people living and working within the Borough. By working together with local people, voluntary organisations and the public and private sectors on active and creative initiatives, we are improving the quality of life for residents, ensuring that communities are supported and developed. Millions of pounds worth of external funding has been sourced from outside the Council to carry out a range of projects varying in size and scale. Large projects often take longer than one financial year and the planning and implementation stages can overlap. The diagram below shows the wide remit of Cultural Services:



### Past Achievements

#### Voluntary Sector

Cultural Services is proud of its work with the voluntary sector.. The creation of an Ashford Community Network has pulled together the influence of the voluntary sector as a whole and has started to deliver measurable benefits to the borough.

#### Community Forums

Our work with parishes, Tenterden Town Council and urban community forums on projects in specific areas has continued and again the improvements have been tangible. This work will continue and we will strive to increase the level of consultation and interaction we have with residents of the borough in order to provide them with the services that they require.

## Current Progress

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### Cultural Strategy

During 2006-2007 we developed the new Cultural Strategy for 2007-2011 entitled *Culture at the Heart*. Although we have celebrated many achievements over the past 4 years we still recognise that we have some way to go before we have fully addressed the borough's growing needs. The new strategy sets out the steps we are taking, with our partners, to improve the level of Cultural service provision across the borough.



### Project Office

During 2006 the Project Office moved into Cultural Services. Due to the major project work that Cultural Services undertakes and the project management function that the Project Office provides there is a clear synergy between the two services. By merging the two services together we will be able to improve the quality and efficiency provided on major projects and develop new working practices which will benefit the borough as a whole.

### Green Corridor Project

In 2006 the final phase of the Green Corridor project was completed. The project involved developing areas along side rivers, opening them up to people by creating woodlands, laying down footpaths and encouraging natural environmental features such as bogs and wild fields. The project also included landscaping and children's facilities in Victoria Park and was funded by a £1.5m grant from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department for Communities and Local Government).

### Willesborough Dykes

Significant progress was made this year with the planned development of Willesborough Dykes area into a natural wetland park. Consultation with the residents of the surrounding area is progressing well and it is expected that work on site will commence in 2007.

### Healthy Living

Healthy living is an area that the Council is actively promoting. In 2006 the Courtside multi-use outdoor games area opened, which accommodates the Ashford Netball League and other sports such as tennis, basketball and football. The Council secured funding of approximately £850k from the Big Lottery Fund to enable this project to proceed.

### Swanton house

The Council continues to work closely with the voluntary sector and during 2006 we worked with KCC and the Ashford Community Network to enable the opening of a resource centre for ethnic groups Swanton House. The formerly empty office space was converted to become a focal point for black and minority ethnic communities. The voluntary groups based at the centre are the Ashford International Chinese Association, the Ashford Muslim Association, the Gaxmudian Kurdish Community, the Kent Black and Minority Ethnic Network, the Sagarmatha Gurkha Community and the Ashford Dyslexia Centre

### Tourism

A draft Tourism Development Framework was approved by the Council in 2006 and consultation with the public has recently ended. The Council looks forward to implementing the framework during 2007 and enhance the opportunities for tourism throughout the

## Future Goals

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### Community Strategy

The Council will continue to take a leading role within the Local Strategic Partnership and develop, with our partners, the long term strategy for the Borough. During 2006 the LSP approved Play Matters, the Play Strategy for the Borough and the Council will seek substantial funds from the Big Lottery Fund to enable us to implement the strategy during 2007 and beyond.

### Cultural Strategy (Part 2)

During 2007 we will produce part 2 of the Cultural Strategy: *Building Culture in Ashford's Future*. This supplementary planning document aims to support development of vital cultural and community infrastructures as Ashford grows.

### Contact

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### Cultural Services Performance Indicators

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| INDICATOR | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|-----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| BV 170a   | Number of visits to galleries and museums per 1,000 population   | 69                | 877               | 54                | ✗              | 54                | 54                | 54                |
| BV 170b   | Number of visits to galleries & museums that were in person per 1,000 population.                                    | 69                | 877               | 54                | ✗              | 54                | 54                | 54                |
| BV 170c   | Number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups   | 268               | 7031              | 422               | ✗              | 500               | 500               | 500               |
| BV 226a   | Total amount spent on advice and guidance services provided by external organisations                                | £188,974.00       | £124,000          | £146,248          | ✓              | £120k             | £124k             | £128k             |
| BV 226b   | % of monies spent on organisations holding the CLS Quality Mark at General Help level & above                        | 62.32%            | 98.00%            | 76.19%            | ✗              | 98.00%            | 98.20%            | 98.40%            |
| BV 226c   | Total amount spent on advice & guidance for housing, welfare benefits and consumer matters – direct provision by ABC | £0                | £0                | £0                | n/a            | £0                | £0                | £0                |
| CS 3      | Amount of external funding levered into community projects   | 14:1              | 7:1               | 8:1               | ✓              | 9:1               | 9:1               | 9:1               |
| CS 10     | Number of usable sports pitches  | 21                | 39                | New definition    | ✗              |                   | deleted           |                   |

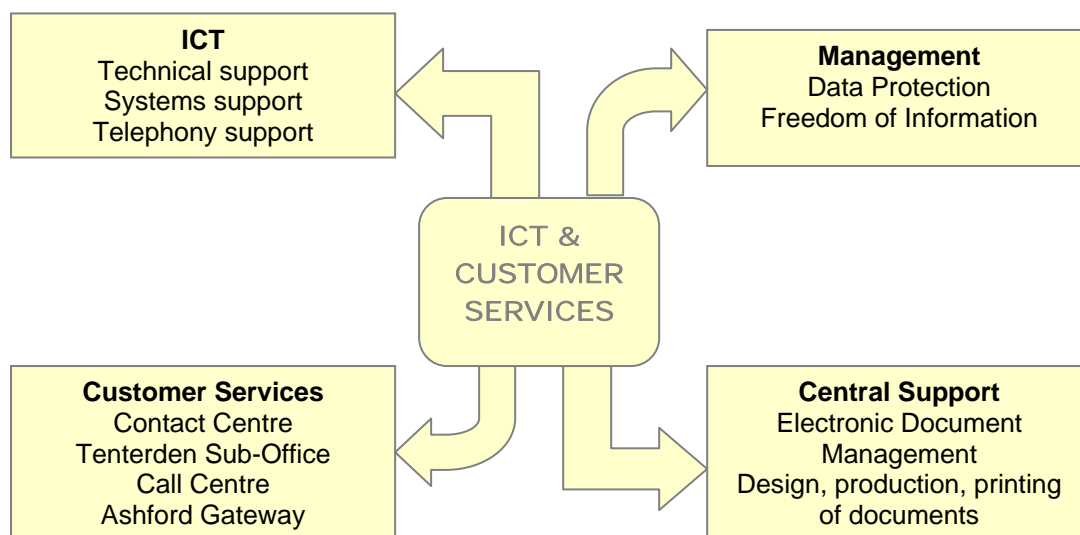
| INDICATOR | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result   | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target     | 2008/09<br>Target      | 2009/10<br>Target      |
|-----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|           | available per 1000 population  |                   |                   |                     |                |                       |                        |                        |
| CS 20     | Number of additional arts/sports/cultural initiatives  | 15                | 11                | 8                   | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 21     | % of satisfaction of customers accessing the tourism service through the tourist information centres (TIC)       | 100%              | 100%              | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              | 100%                  | 100%                   | 100%                   |
| CS 22     | % increase in profit on income generated by the (TICs)   | 35.55%            | 25%               | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              | 5% above 06/07 result | 10% above 06/07 result | 15% above 06/07 result |
| CS 23     | Number of forums where young people are involved in planning provision   | 4                 | 4                 | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              | 12                    | 16                     | 20                     |
| CS 25     | Number of new campaigns targeting your peoples concerns as targeted by What Matters strategy                     | 6                 | 5                 | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 26     | Number of people with specific health problems and disabilities engaged in sports or physical activity           | 125               | 70                | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 27     | Number of local artists and crafts people accessing new training opportunities provided/supported by ABC         | 77                | 60                | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 28     | Number of arts initiatives and support provided by ABC that enhance neighbourhoods and meet local cultural needs | 6                 | 5                 | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 29     | % of VCS organisations in the borough who are members of Ashford Community network                               | 12%               | 10%               | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 30     | % of agencies partnering cultural services in project delivery who are from the voluntary and community sector.  | 55.95%            | 40%               | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              | 45%                   | 47.5%                  | 50%                    |
| CS 31     | % of key partners satisfied with Cultural services input into partnership projects                               | 100%              | 80%               | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |
| CS 33     | Number of trusts providing annual development plans to Cultural services   | 36%               | 36%               | New indicator 06-07 | ✓              |                       | deleted                |                        |

## 8.7 Information Communications Technology (ICT) & Customer Services

### What Do We Do?

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Both sections of this Service work to let people contact the Council in whatever form they want, whenever they want. This includes everything from the Call Centre and Customer Contact Centre to the internal telephone and computer networks. Making sure that the ICT infrastructure is up to date and providing related support enables others to do their work effectively.



### Past Achievements

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#### Council Online

Having achieved our target of 100% electronic service availability we have made a number of improvements. A new Council web site has been rolled out providing easier access to a wealth of information on everything from electoral registration to bulky refuse collection. The software for the GIS (graphical interface system) digital mapping has been upgraded thereby improving peoples ability to view and comment upon planning applications online.

#### Current Progress

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#### Joint Working

We have joined up with a number of other councils in Kent to examine the feasibility of a joint call centre. Working with Shepway, Thanet, Dover and Canterbury councils and with Kent Connects it is hoped that through collaborations of this type costs savings and efficiencies can be found in delivering call centre services whilst at the same time maintain or improving upon the quality of the service provided.

#### Virtual Server Project

In order to manage the increasing need to expand our data storage capacity, during 2006-2007 we rolled out a new storage platform. This has increased the security of data stored on our servers and has also resulted in a 'greener' infrastructure as the electricity required to power the servers has been decreased.

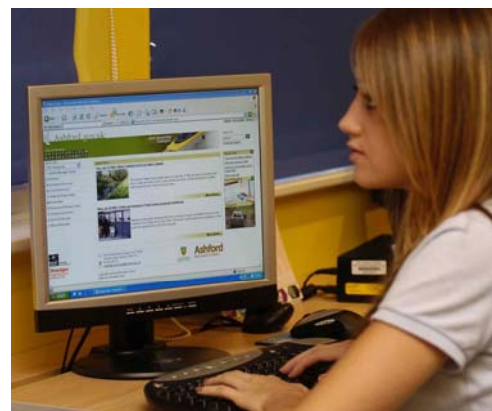
#### E-Mail Archiving

During 2006-2007 we rolled out a new e-mail archiving system across the Council. The new service automatically archives all e-mail removing the need for local storage. This reduces the server space

required whilst also complying with various legal requirements regarding data retention.

### Home Working

During the year we have conducted a review of home working within our Customer Services department. It is anticipated that the introduction of home working will lead to a reduction in call waiting times at peak hours and allow the Council to provide a more effective and efficient service to customers.



### Future Goals

#### Single Point of Access

During 2007-2008 the Council will become the first local authority in the UK to use Smart Point. Smart Point effectively joins up back office systems and provides customers with a single point of access to all of their details held by the Council. The introduction of this system should greatly improve the speed by which our customers interact with the Council and should enhance our Customers experience and satisfaction when dealing with us.

### Contact

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### ICT & Customer Services Performance Indicators

| INDICATOR | DESCRIPTION                                    | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|-----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ICT1      | % Help Desk calls dealt with in 2 working days | 79.42%            | 82.00%            | 80.50%            | ✗              | 82%               | 83%               | 84%               |
| ICT2      | % of customers seen within 15 minutes          | 94.02%            | 90.00%            | 91.05%            | ✓              | 95%               | 95%               | 95%               |
| ICT3a     | % of time e-mail system available              | 99.98%            | 100%              | New 06/07         | ✗              | 99.95%            | 99.95%            | 99.95%            |
| ICT3b     | % of time revenues & benefits system available | 99.98%            | 100%              | New 06/07         | ✗              | 99.95%            | 99.95%            | 99.95%            |
| ICT3c     | % of time e-financial system available         | 99.90%            | 100%              | New 06/07         | ✗              | 99.95%            | 99.95%            | 99.95%            |
| ICT3d     | % of car parking system available              | 99.98%            | 100%              | New 06/07         | ✗              | 99.95%            | 99.95%            | 99.95%            |
| ICT3e     | % of time web site available                   | 99.89%            | 100%              | New 06/07         | ✗              | 99.95%            | 99.95%            | 99.95%            |
| ICT3f     | % of time CRM system available                 | 99.98%            | 100%              | New 06/07         | ✗              | 99.95%            | 99.95%            | 99.95%            |
| ICT4a     | % of calls answered within 120 seconds         | 74.50%*           | 82.00%            | 69.98%            | ✗              | 82%               | 82%               | 82%               |

| INDICATOR | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|-----------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ICT4b     | Average time taken to answer by a call centre operator (seconds)         | 98*               | 90                | 98.50             | ✘              | 90                | 88                | 86                |
| ICT4c     | % of calls answered by CSA within 10 mins                                | 99.21%*           | 95.00%            | New<br>06/07      | ✔              | 99%               | 99%               | 99%               |
| ICT4d     | % of callers satisfied with CSA without referral                         | 84.47%*           | 85.00%            | New<br>06/07      | ✘              | 85%               | 86%               | 87%               |
| ICT6b     | % of Customer Contact Centre visits dealt with at first point of contact | 96.73%*           | 85.00%            | 94.00%            | ✔              | 97%               | 97%               | 97%               |

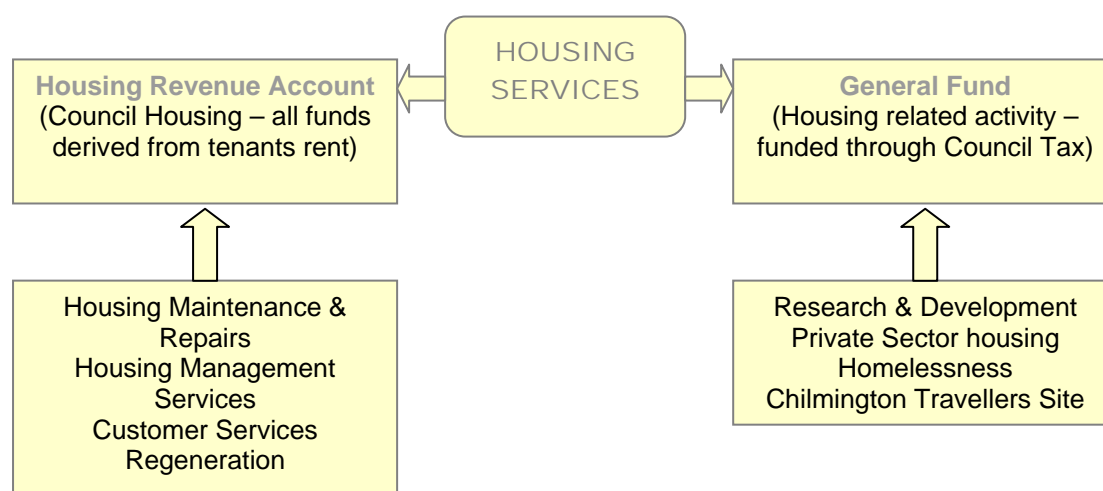
\* estimated year end results – final results still awaited

## 8.8 Housing Services

### What Do We Do?

The Council's Housing Service covers all aspects of housing and is dedicated to providing decent sustainable homes and communities. It is responsible for:

- Managing 5,400 council properties and 2,300 garages in the borough
- Provision of sheltered housing for older tenants within the councils 13 sheltered housing schemes
- Providing housing advice, including allocation of rented council properties via Choice Based Lettings
- Working with Housing Associations and developers to increasing the numbers of affordable homes in the borough
- Preventing homelessness wherever possible and supporting those who do become homeless
- Administering disabled facilities grants and actively promoting energy efficiency
- Working with private sector landlords to improved the quality of their rented properties
- Managing the Chilmington travellers site



### Past Achievements

#### Providing Decent Homes

Ashford has continued to achieve the government's Decent Homes standard. We first achieved this in 2004/5, some 5 years ahead of the government's 2010 target. Ashford is one of only a small number of authorities in England that have met this standard to date.

#### Affordable homes

Since 1998 over 904 affordable homes, for rent, shared ownership and low cost home ownership have been completed within the borough of Ashford

#### Rent collection

The introduction of improved and more flexible payment options for tenants has resulted in very high rent collection levels. For the second year running we have achieved a collection rate in excess of 99% and lower levels of bad debts and write offs.

### Current Progress

#### Stanhope Regeneration

Following extensive negotiations the Council has awarded the Private Financial Initiative contract to regenerate the Stanhope estate to a consortium of companies called Chrysalis. The regeneration of

Stanhope has been a top priority for the council and under the contract Chrysalis will manage the running of the estate on behalf of the Council for a 30 year period. This will include the redevelopment of the estate over the first 5 year of the contract and the building of 400 new homes.

### Sheltered Housing Service

Following the successful piloting of a new sheltered housing service and formal approval by Members, the Council has started to roll out the new service across all 13 of the sheltered housing schemes in the borough. Providing 24 hour/7 days a week housing related support services the scheme will enable the most vulnerable tenants to remain independent within their own home.



### The Handiest Van in Kent

Following further consultation with our tenants the Council has launched the Handiest Van in Kent Service. Targeting elderly and disabled people this service focuses upon health & safety issues and provides basic services, such as changing light bulbs and basic DIY, which are taken for granted by many but which can drastically improve the quality of life for those less fortunate.

### Environment Improvements

Following on from extensive engagement with tenants the regeneration work on Bybrook Road and Appledore has begun. Over £3m has been set aside to enable the Council to develop and pursue environmental improvement in the boroughs housing stock.

### Affordable Homes

In 2005 a housing needs survey of the borough was completed and recommended that the provision for affordable housing be raised from 20% to 35%. Following on from this review the Council has now adopted as Council Policy the requirement that for all new housing developments at least 35% of the housing should be affordable.

### Tenant Participation

The Council continues to encourage and develop tenant participation. Our approach of both formal and inform communications, via the Tenants newsletter, focus groups, satisfaction surveys and regular meetings has ensured an open and honest dialogue in moving forward the housing agenda. The elected Tenants Forum, whose capacity has grown in the last few years, have an active influence on policy and procedural changes.

### Future Goals

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#### Young Homeless People

In an innovative move to tackle homelessness amongst young people the Council is to introduce an independent mediation service in association with Relate. Under this scheme and where appropriate, where young people have become homeless due to family disputes the young person and their family will be offered the opportunity to be referred to Relate for professional counselling. It is hoped that this additional service will positively contribute to reducing the number of young homeless people.

#### Information Technology

The Housing Service is currently in the process of buying a new Housing IT system to enhance its ability to deal with customers in the most efficient and effective way. It is anticipated that the implementation of the new system will commence at the end of 2007.

### 3 Star Housing

Following on from the Council's success of introducing the Decent Homes standard across the whole of the borough the Council has decided to aim for 3 Star Housing Service recognition. To this end an extensive peer review will be conducted in September 2007. This work will lead to a detailed action plan being developed which, once implemented, will lead to 3 Star recognition by the Audit Commission during 2008.

### Better Homes: Active Lives

In partnership with Kent County Council (KCC) we are looking to procure, through a Public Finance Initiative funding, 36 extra sheltered care homes in the borough. Working in partnership with KCC will allow us to reduce the cost of procuring the new homes and of delivering the housing management and care services in a highly cost effective manner.

### Housing Strategy

Following a major review and consultation exercise during 2006-2007 the Council's new Housing Strategy for 2007-2010 will be submitted for approval by Members in August 2007 along with the review of the homelessness strategy. The strategy will provide a comprehensive statement on how the Council will work with partners to address the housing and related support needs of people living within the borough.

### Contact

Tracey Kerly  
 Head of Housing  
[tracey.kerly@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:tracey.kerly@ashford.gov.uk)  
 01233 330607

### Housing Services Performance Indicators

#### Best Value performance Indicators

| INDICATOR     | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|---------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>BV 63</b>  | Energy efficiency of housing stock   | 68                | 68                | 67                | ✓              | 69                | 69                | 69                |
| <b>BV 64</b>  | Number of unfit private dwellings returned to occupation or demolished as a result of our action | 59                | 56.25             | 7.00              | ✓              | 62                | 62                | 62                |
| <b>BV 66a</b> | Proportion of housing rent collected   | 99.27%            | 98.33%            | 99.22%            | ✓              | 99.25%            | 99.25%            | 99.25%            |
| <b>BV 66b</b> | % of Council tenants with more than 7 weeks rent arrears   | 16.16%            | 14.50%            | 14.77%            | ✗              | 14.50%            | 14.00%            | 13.50%            |
| <b>BV 66c</b> | % of Council tenants in arrears  | 35.16%            | 52.00%            | 53.17%            | ✓              | 52.00%            | 51.00%            | 50.00%            |

| INDICATOR      | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result  | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|----------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                | who have had Notices Seeking Possession served   |                   |                   |                    |                |                   |                   |                   |
| <b>BV 66d</b>  | % of tenants evicted as a result of rent arrears   | 00.31%            | 0.30%             | 0%                 | ✗              | 0.30%             | 0.29%             | 0.28%             |
| <b>BV 74a</b>  | % of tenants satisfied when surveyed   | 78%               | 78%               | 80%<br>(2003/2004) | ✓              | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 74b</b>  | % of Ethnic Minority tenants satisfied when surveyed   | 56%               | 78%               | 72%<br>(2003/2004) | ✗              | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 74c</b>  | % of Non Ethnic minority tenants satisfied when surveyed   | 79%               | 78%               | 81%<br>(2003/2004) | ✓              | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 75a</b>  | Satisfaction of tenants with participation   | 66%               | 62%               | 61%<br>(2003/2004) | ✓              | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 75b</b>  | Satisfaction of Ethnic Minority tenants with participation   | 63%               | 62%               | 58%<br>(2003/2004) | ✓              | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 75c</b>  | Satisfaction with participation non Ethnic Minority  | 66%               | 62%               | 61%<br>(2003/2004) | ✓              | n/a               | n/a               | tbc               |
| <b>BV 164</b>  | Tackling racial equality in social housing   | Yes               | Yes               | Yes                | ✓              | Yes               | Yes               | Yes               |
| <b>BV 183a</b> | Average length of stay in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation for the unintentionally homeless | 4.89 weeks        | 1 week            | 4.26 weeks         | ✗              | Indicator deleted |                   |                   |
| <b>BV 183b</b> | Average length of stay in temporary hostel accommodation for the unintentionally homeless            | 0 weeks           | 0 weeks           | 0 weeks            | ✓              | 0 weeks           | 0 weeks           | 0 weeks           |
| <b>BV 184a</b> | Proportion of non-decent local authority dwellings   | 0.65%             | 21%               | 1%                 | ✓              | 0%                | 0%                | 0%                |
| <b>BV 184b</b> | % change in proportion of non-decent dwellings over the financial year                               | 0%                | 22.60%            | 14.50%             | ✗              | 15%               | 15%               | 15%               |
| <b>BV 202</b>  | Number of people sleeping rough on a single night  | 2                 | <5                | 2                  | ✓              | 2                 | 2                 | 2                 |
| <b>BV 203</b>  | % change in the average number   | -1.05%            | -6.94%            | 4.59%%             | ✗              | 1%                | 1%                | 1%                |

| INDICATOR     | DESCRIPTION   | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|---------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|               | of families placed in temporary accommodation   |                   |                   |                   |                |                   |                   |                   |
| <b>BV 212</b> | Average time to re-let Council dwellings  | 25.35 days        | 24 days           | 24 days           | ✗              | 24                | 24                | 24                |
| <b>BV 213</b> | Number of households no longer homeless due to Council action per 1000 households           | 10.3              | 11                | 9                 | ✗              | 12                | 12                | 12                |
| <b>BV 214</b> | % of homeless households who have been homeless within last two years (repeat homelessness) | 0.83%             | 16.00%            | 7.48              | ✓              | 0.37%             | 0.37%             | 0.37%             |

## Local performance Indicators

| INDICATOR  | DESCRIPTION  | 2006/07<br>Result | 2006/07<br>Target | 2005/06<br>Result | Target<br>met? | 2007/08<br>Target | 2008/09<br>Target | 2009/10<br>Target |
|------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>H1</b>  | Council properties with a current gas safety certificate | 96.86%            | 100%              | 97.00%            | ✗              | 100%              | 100%              | 100%              |
| <b>H2</b>  | Responsive repairs (committed spend) against target      | £1,097,553        | £1.2m             | £976,613          | ✓              | £1m               | £1m               | £1m               |
| <b>H3</b>  | Rent loss on void property                               | 0.54%             | 0.70%             | 0.49%             | ✓              |                   | Deleted           |                   |
| <b>H6</b>  | B&B Percentage costs recovered                           | 87.73%            | 80.00%            | 90.09%            | ✓              | 83%               | 84%               | 85%               |
| <b>H8</b>  | % phone calls answered in 120 seconds                    | 97.38%            | 82.00%            | 97.00%            | ✓              | 97%               | 97%               | 97%               |
| <b>H9</b>  | Average call answer time in seconds                      | 17.75             | 90                | 17                | ✓              | 20                | 20                | 20                |
| <b>H11</b> | Calls abandoned by caller                                | 4.80%             | 10.00%            | 6.25%             | ✓              | 6%                | 6%                | 6%                |

## 9. Statement on Internal Control

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### **Ashford Borough Council 2006/2007**

#### **Statement on Internal Control**

##### Part 1 Scope of Responsibility

Ashford Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Ashford Borough Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, Ashford Borough Council is also responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of Ashford Borough Council functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

##### Part 2 The Purpose of the System of Internal Control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; it can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Ashford Borough Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realized and the impact should they be realized and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The system of Internal Control has been in place at Ashford Borough Council for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007 and up to the date of the approval of the annual report and accounts and, except for the details of significant internal control issues at section 5, accords with proper practice.

##### Part 3 The Internal Control Environment

The key elements of Ashford Borough Council's internal control environment are as follows:

- The Council has adopted a constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and that the Council is accountable to local people.
- Most major policy decisions are made by the Executive Committee in public meetings on the basis of published reports. The facilitation of policy and decision-making is through the two Policy Advisory Groups – 'Other Issues' and Resources & Best Value'. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees provide a scrutiny function over the decisions made by the Executive as well as providing public reviews of issues or council services that affect local people. In addition senior officers of the council can make decisions under delegated authority. The Council publishes a Forward Plan which contains details of key decisions to be made by the Council, its committees and officers under their delegated powers.
- The Council has in place robust arrangements to ensure probity in all its decision-making. It adopted the new model code of conduct in 2002 and it will adopt a new model code of conduct during 2007. In addition it has adopted a comprehensive good practice protocol for councillors dealing with planning matters. The Council's Standards Committee, chaired by an independent member of the public oversees conduct issues. The Standards Committee has in place agreed procedures for dealing with local investigation hearings in accordance with the regulations which allow the Standards Board for England to refer allegations of misconduct for local decisions. In-house and external training has been undertaken for councillors on probity

matters.

- The Council's Risk Management Strategy was approved by the Executive on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2006. The annual Service and Strategic Risk assessments for the Council were conducted in December 2006. From the assessments Service and Strategic Risk Registers and Service and Strategic Risk Action Plans were created and these are reviewed on a quarterly basis. During 2006-2007 Risk assessments were expanded to include Business Continuity. Risk management is becoming firmly embedded throughout the Council and the Deputy Leader of the Council's Portfolio of responsibilities now include Risk and Business Continuity. There are clear linkages between objectives and the risk evaluation process that ensures that service risks are minimized and aligned to delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.
- The Council has a comprehensive Health & Safety Policy in place and a Risk Register for the protection of staff. Operational issues are overseen by an officer working group which from May 2006 introduced an on-going and comprehensive audit and assessment of Health & Safety throughout all services,
- Through reviews by external auditors, external agencies, Internal Audit and internal groups, the Council constantly seeks ways of ensuring the economical, effective and efficient use of resources and for securing continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Services are delivered by trained and experienced people with appropriate professional qualifications. All posts have a detailed job description and person specifications. Training needs are identified through Personal Development Discussions and needs are fulfilled by a combination of internal and external training providers.
- The Council has designated the Head of Legal & Democratic Services as Monitoring Officer. It is the function of the Monitoring officer to ensure compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations. After consulting with the Head of Paid Service and Chief Finance Officer, the Monitoring Officer will report to the full Council if he considers that any proposal, decision or omission would give rise to unlawfulness. Such a report will have the effect of stopping the proposal or decision being implemented until the report has been considered.
- The financial management of the authority is conducted in accordance with the financial rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution and within Financial Regulations. The Council has designated the Deputy Chief Executive as Chief Finance Officer in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. The Chief Financial Officer has statutory responsibilities to determine, monitor and report on the Council's financial arrangements including reporting on any unlawful or potentially unlawful decisions. The Council has in place a MTFP (Medium Term Financial Plan), updated annually, to support the medium-term aims of the Corporate Plan. Financial monitoring arrangements are in place and reported quarterly to the Executive.
- The Council maintains an Internal Audit Section, managed from September 2005 by a partnership arrangement with Maidstone Borough Council, which operates to the standards set out in the 'Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the UK'.
- The Council has an objective and professional relationship with external auditors and statutory inspectors as evidenced by the Annual Audit Letter.
- The Council has an effective performance management framework. The system is driven by the Corporate Plan which focuses attention on corporate priorities. This is cascaded through departmental service plans, individual employee appraisals and action plans. It provides the mechanism for targets, Performance Indicators and objectives to be reviewed by the Executive and Scrutiny Committees and for reviews of Service Objectives to be fed back into the policy and planning cycle.

- As part of the performance management framework the Council conducts quarterly performance management meetings for all services. These meetings review the services performance in relation to performance indicators, budget monitoring, service plan delivery and during 2006-2007 the meetings were expanded to include Health & Safety and Risk updates and reports.
- During 2006-2007 the Council drafted a new Corporate Plan to cover the period 2007-2010. The Corporate Plan will be formally submitted to Members for approval during 2007-2008 and following the local elections in May 2007. All services have developed new Service Plans which will enable the Council to implement and deliver the plan.

#### Part 4 Review of Effectiveness

Ashford Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness of internal control is informed by the work of the internal auditors and the senior managers within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates in their annual audit letter and other reports.

The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control includes:

- The Head of Legal & Democratic Services (the 'Monitoring Officer') has a duty to monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure its aims and principles are given full effect. The Council's constitution was refreshed and updated during the course of 2006-2007 and has been published on the Council's web site and is available on CD ROM.
- The Monitoring Officer presents an annual report to the Council and the Standards Committee regarding probity and code of conduct issues. His annual report for 2006-2007 will be presented to the Council in July 2007 and it will show that no complaints about code of conduct breaches by borough Councillors were investigated during the year.
- The Council has two Overview and Scrutiny Committees. They can "call in" a decision which has been made by the Executive but not yet implemented, to enable them to consider whether the decision is appropriate. They allow matters of wide ranging interest to the Council to be publicly reviewed and scrutinised.
- In 2006-2007 the Council formed an Audit Committee. The Audit Committee has responsibility for reviewing the adequacy of internal controls and monitoring the performance of internal audit. It also reviews the External Audit Plan, reviews the Annual Audit Commission Letter, reviews the adequacy of arrangements for Risk Management within the Council and approves the Council's financial accounts.
- Internal Audit is responsible for monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of systems of internal control. A risk model is used to formulate a three-year plan, which is approved by the Audit Committee, from which the annual workload is identified. The reporting process for Internal Audit requires a report of each audit to be submitted to the relevant Head of Service with a copy to the Chief Executive, the Directors and the Head of Corporate Governance. The report includes recommendations for improvements to internal controls and these are detailed within an Action Plan for agreement or rejection by Heads of Service. The process also allows for follow up work to be completed for all reports issued in order to confirm that the action proposed by the Head of Service has been implemented in practice. The results of the follow-up are reported to the Head of Service, the Chief Executive, Directors and the Head of Corporate Governance and reported to the Audit Committee on a six monthly basis.
- As part of the monitoring of the Internal Control processes within the Council, Internal Audit

issue an Annual Report that considers the work of Internal Audit over the financial year and the Opinion of the Head of Internal Audit (the Audit partnership Manager) in relation to the Council's control environment. Due consideration is given to this report and the reports conclusions are used to inform the judgment on the Statement on Internal Control. For 2006-2007 the Head of Internal Audit concluded that generally, a substantial level of internal control exists within the Council's systems and procedures.

- The Internal Audit Section is subject to regular appraisal by the Council's external auditors who review the adequacy of compliance with the Code of Practice for Internal Audit. The external auditors place reliance on the work carried out by Internal Audit subject to being satisfied with the quality and comprehensiveness of the work. They have been able to do so for the financial year 2006-2007.
- The Head of Corporate Governance and the Head of Financial Services bring a report on Key Indicator progress against targets and budget monitoring to Management Team and the Executive as part of the Quarterly Performance Report. Monthly updates are available on all Local and Best Value PI's on the Internet and Intranet. Monthly monitoring reports on budgets are prepared and are posted on the intranet.
- The Council uses performance management software (PBViews) to provide an easy to follow visual indication of the Council's performance against its targets for Best Value Performance Indicators and Local performance Indicators. This is available both internally and externally on the Council's web site.
- The Council reviewed and revised material elements of its Financial Regulations during 2006-2007 with the revised regulations being approved in February 2007.
- For 2006-2007 the Council introduced improvements to the way it reviews the effectiveness of its internal controls. The Heads of Service Assurance Statements which each Head of Service is required to complete will be audited by Internal Audit for the first time. The Corporate Assurance Statement has been compiled electronically and is available for scrutiny by Members. Both statements follow CIPFA/SOLACE guidance. Any major exceptions which are identified will be reported upon quarterly to the Audit Committee until the exceptions are rectified and these exceptions are detailed below. Any other weaknesses that are identified will be dealt with via an action plan to remedy the weaknesses and will be reported upon quarterly to Management Team.

#### Part 5 Significant Internal Control Issues

The following significant internal control issues have been identified during the period 2006-2007: These exceptions and the actions being taken to rectify them will be reported upon to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis within a Statement on Internal Control Quarterly Progress Report.

| No. | Issue  | Action   |
|-----|--|--|
|     | There is no formal adoption of a Local Code of Corporate Governance. | A draft Local Code of Corporate Governance has been written and will be submitted to Management Team in June 2007 for consideration before being submitted to Members.   |
| 2   | Financial Regulations  | Material amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules were approved by The Executive in February 2007. However, a general update and review of the regulations is still outstanding. This is now scheduled to occur during the first half of 2007-2008 and updates on this process will be provided to the Audit Committee. |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 3 | Internal Control of bank reconciliations.                 | An Internal Audit review of bank reconciliation in August 2006 identified major areas of concern with regards to bank reconciliation. A follow-up audit was carried out in December 2006 and although action has been taken to deal with the weaknesses, not all recommendations had been implemented and timely reconciliation is not yet embedded within Financial Services. Monthly reports to the Chairman of the Audit Committee are currently being provided by the Head of Financial Services and quarterly updates will be provided on the progress in remedying the weaknesses identified previously. |
| 4 | Financial Authorisation levels (creditor payments system) | Following an Internal Audit review of Financial Authorisation Levels across services in March 2007 (reported issued in April 2007) weaknesses were identified. Due to the increased financial risk this potentially exposes the Council to this has been deemed as a weakness and has therefore been included as an exception. The work to correct this has been put in hand and will be completed soon; progress will be reported upon to the Audit Committee.  |

Chief Executive

Leader of the Council

Dated.....

## 10. Useful Web Addresses

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|  |   |                         |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| <a href="http://www.ashford.gov.uk">www.ashford.gov.uk</a>                   | - | Ashford Borough Council |
| <a href="http://www.kent.gov.uk">www.kent.gov.uk</a>                         | - | Kent County Council     |
| <a href="http://www.goashford.com">www.goashford.com</a>                     | - | Community resource      |
| <a href="http://www.kent.police.uk">www.kent.police.uk</a>                   | - | Kent Police             |
| <a href="http://www.ashfordgateway.co.uk">www.ashfordgateway.co.uk</a>       | - | Ashford Gateway         |
| <a href="http://www.ashfordbestplaced.co.uk">www.ashfordbestplaced.co.uk</a> | - | Ashford's Future        |