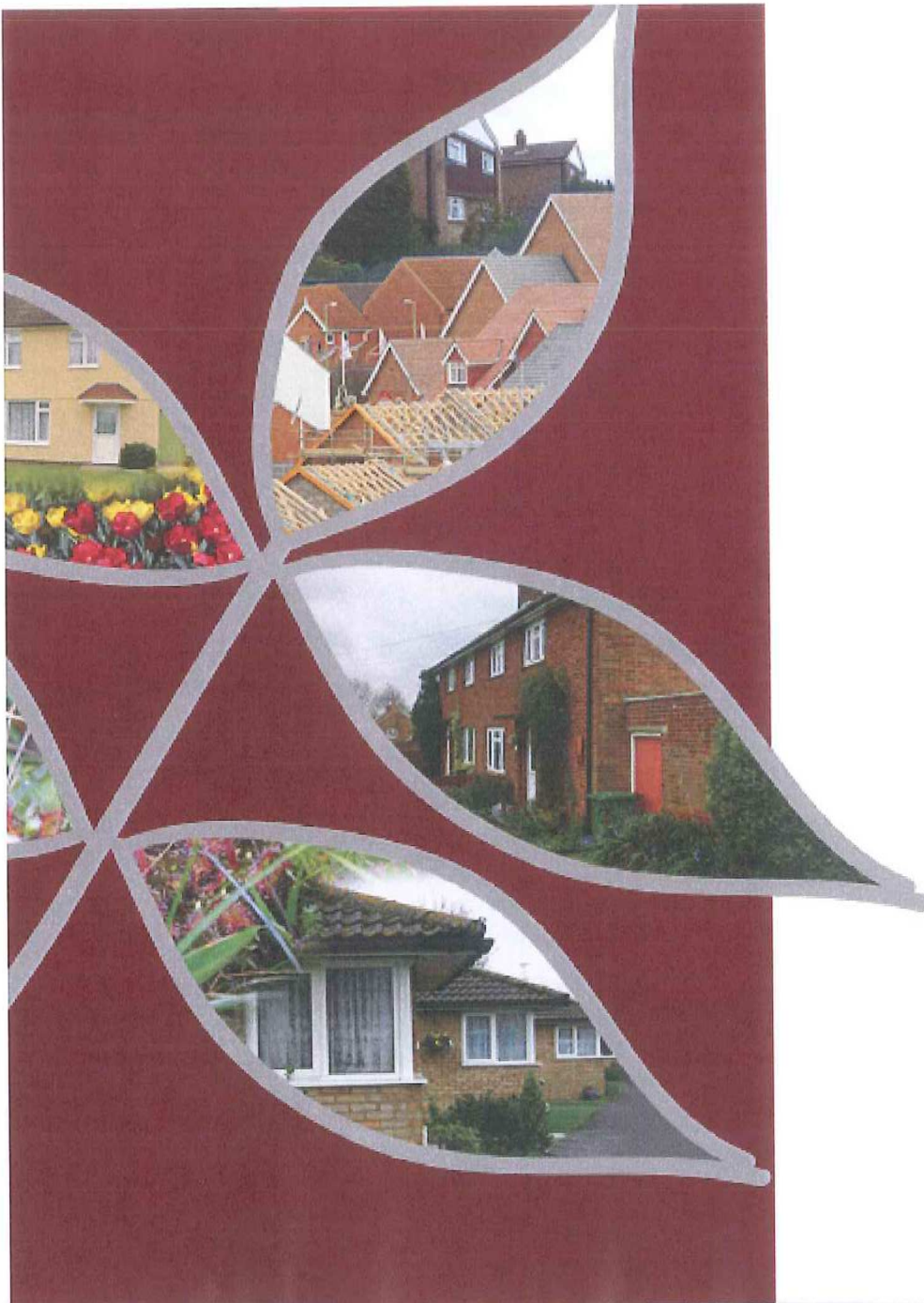




ASHFORD  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



# Customers, Homes and Property Quarterly Performance Report

November 2011

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## 1. EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

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

Ashford Gateway Plus opened on 18 July 2011 and celebrated its official opening on 7 October. General feedback from the public has been very positive.

Partners are all operating effectively, however there are some services which are suffering and these tend to be on the higher floors. Whilst Skills Plus have seen a huge take up of their services, Adult Education class enrolments are down some 35% due to the economic climate and change of venue. The café (Food with Friends) achieved a five star rating from Environmental Services, however as a social enterprise they are desperately in need of increased take up of their service offering to ensure they can continue to operate within the building.

### \* **Council properties - 3 Year Planned Programme (Owner Chris Tillin 01233 330483)**

In order to keep our council housing tenants informed of forthcoming work to be carried out to their properties, CHAPs will be reintroducing the issuing of detailed plans highlighting the main works that are planned to be carried out over the next 3 year. The plan will cover work which is required to be carried out to ensure that the council's housing stock continues to meet the Decent Homes Standard, and cover such items as kitchen, bathroom, heating and electrical refurbishment together with works to the roof and walls.

Stanhope council properties will not feature in the 3 year plan as they are managed by Moat as part of the PFI scheme.

(For information - Longer terms plans were produced for tenants up to 2009 but were suspended due to the uncertainty of future council housing funding which was under review by Government.)

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

Members are no doubt already aware that KCC's Supporting People Programme has been forced to reduce their budgets across all services they fund. This includes the funding for social alarm systems, or lifeline connection costs that they are prepared to fund.

Up to March 2012 this funding will be payable at a rate of £1.50 per connection per week, but from April 2012 this reduces to £0.90 per connection per week. The effect of this on CHAPs and by direct consequence Ashford Monitoring Centre, will be a reduced income of approximately £30,000 a year.

### \* **Civic Centre accommodation (Owner John Young 01233 330865)**

The Council now has the Driving Standards Agency, Health Protection Agency, HM Revenue & Customs and Kent County Council's (KCC) Social Services as tenants of the Civic Centre with the Children and Families team from KCC taking up occupancy on Level 2 shortly. At this time we will have secured tenants for all the office space made available by the accommodation review and with approximately a third of the Civic Centre's office space now occupied by tenants, we can expect a total rental income of £362k during 2012/13.

With the successful completion of the accommodation review, we have taken the opportunity to re-evaluate how internal accommodation costs are allocated. From April 2012, the method of recharging Council services for office accommodation costs will change. It will no longer be allocated based on the number of staff each service employs and will instead be based upon the floor area allocated. In addition to being a fairer and equitable way of recharging accommodation costs, and reflecting commercial practice, it will help act as an incentive to use office space efficiently.

**\* New Build sites - Phase 2 update (Owner Paul McKenner 01233 330419)**

The Council has appointed two principal contractors to build 53 units of Affordable Housing, 44 units eleven sites by ISG Construction and 9 units at Orion Way by Westridge Construction. Good progress is now being made and both contractors are producing a good standard of work and on track to complete by the end of March 2012.

To date three sites have been completed and handed over at Orchard Fields, Bethersden, The Chennells, High Halden and Nine Acres, Ashford. A number of sites are due for completion shortly in Ashford, Biddenden and Great Chart, with sites at Beaver Lane and Orion Way, both in Ashford and Luckley House in Wye due for completion by March 2012.

The progress and quality of the properties has increased significantly as time has progressed, completion dates are being met and the quality of the finished properties that are being handed over is very good. Care has been especially taken on the finishes, such as decorations, tiling and floor coverings. Overall the finished product has impressed all those that have seen and visited the properties.

**In the next Issue:           Number of Housing complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.**

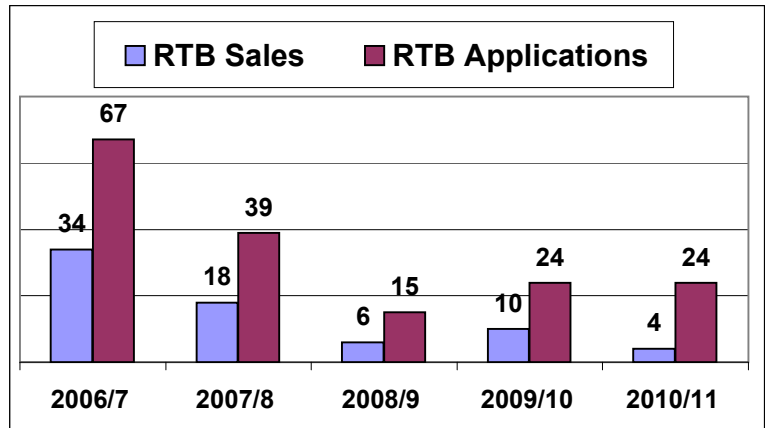
## 2. RIGHT TO BUY (RTB) UPDATE (Owner Sue Major 01233 330531)

\* To the end of October 2011 there were 7 property sold under Right to Buy, an increase over last years low point when only 4 properties were sold in the year. Applications remain low with 14 so far to the end of October.

\* RTB sales nationally remain subdued reflecting economic circumstances and the limited availability of suitable finance packages for borrowers.

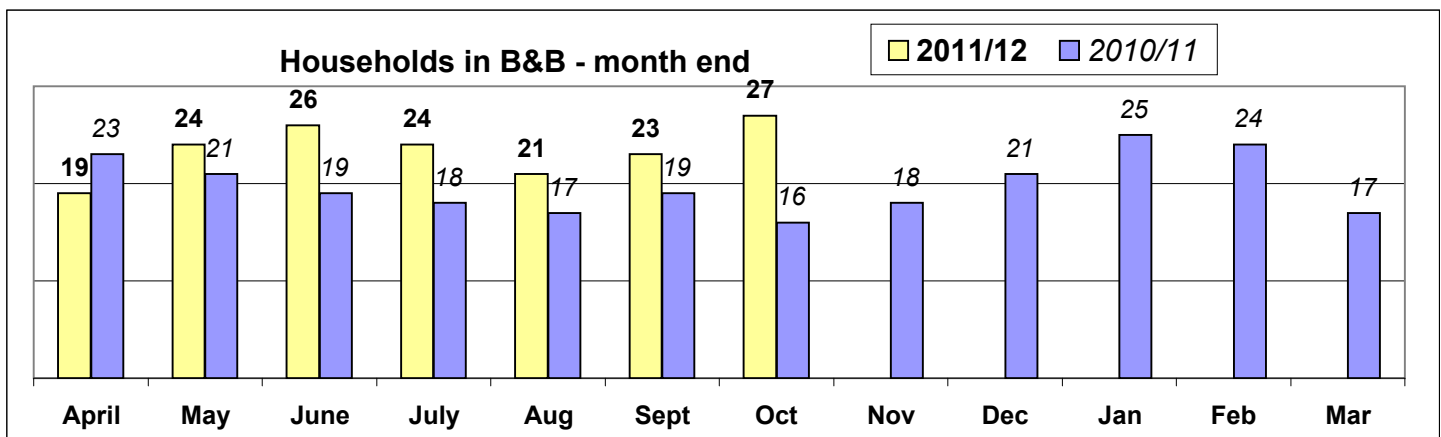
\* At the beginning of October the Prime Minister announced plans to revive the RTB policy and increase the discounts available to council tenants. Subsequent announcements have confirmed that discounts of up to 50% will be available. Currently the maximum discount in Ashford is £38,000 on a average sale valuation of £149,000 per property this year.

\* A consultation paper is due shortly from Communities & Local Government (CLG) to councils on securing/retaining RTB receipts for future new build.

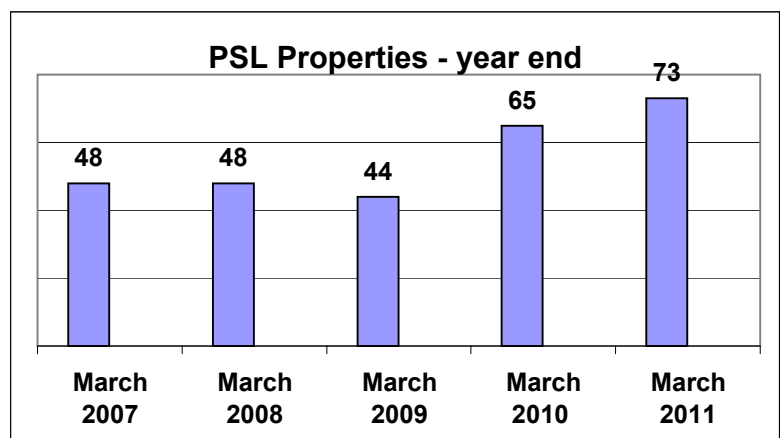


## 3. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION UPDATE (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

\* At the end of October 2011 the numbers of Households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) was 27. Numbers this year are higher to a similar period last year and highlights the pressure on the service going forward even with the financial support of Private Sector Leasing (PSL).



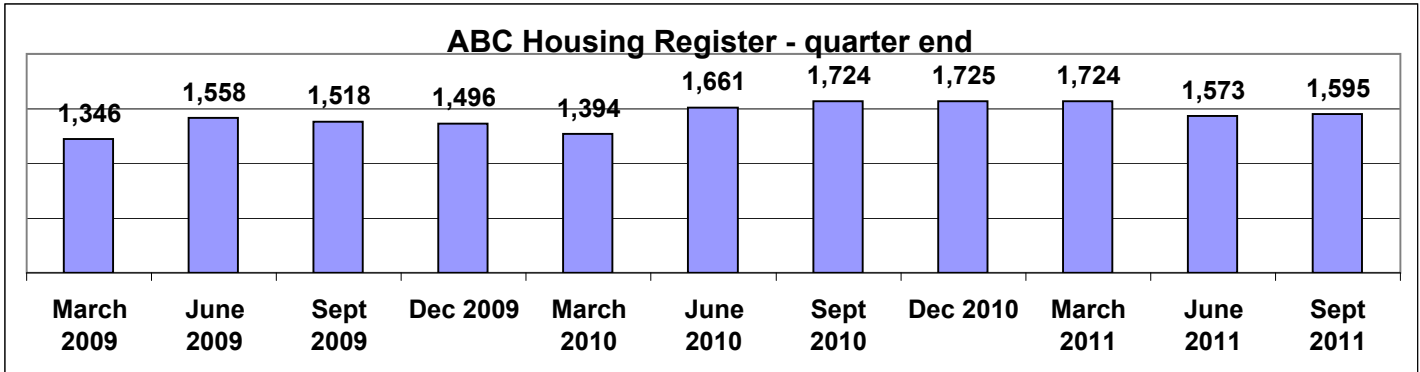
\* Number of Private Sector Leasing (PSL) properties at the end of October stood at 69. The budget for 2011/12 of 70 PSL properties does not include any material increases, other than churn in the number of PSL properties during the year as properties are returned to landlords. This activity continues to remain dependant on Housing Benefit (HB) rules and funding and is potentially exposed by any reductions in HB.



\* The numbers of PSL properties are forecast to remain relatively unchanged for 2012/13. The contribution from PSL continues to be used to fund the preventative agenda in Ashford.

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

\* Housing Register numbers at the end of the September 2011 quarter stood at 1,595.



\* Numbers housed via Choice Based Lettings (CBL) now including shared ownership was 371 at the end of October 2011.

\* Average waiting time for a successful council housing application in 2011/12 is currently 14 months which is marginally better than last year where the wait was 15 months.

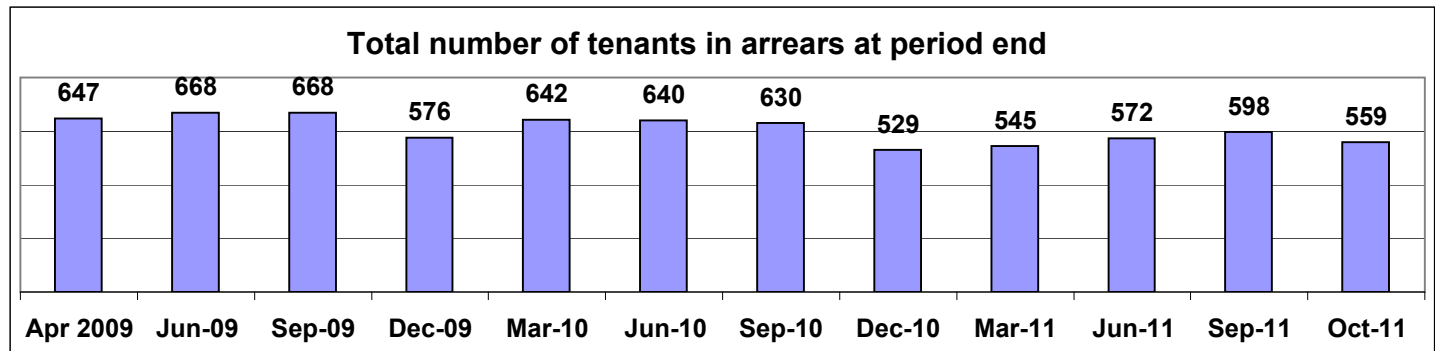
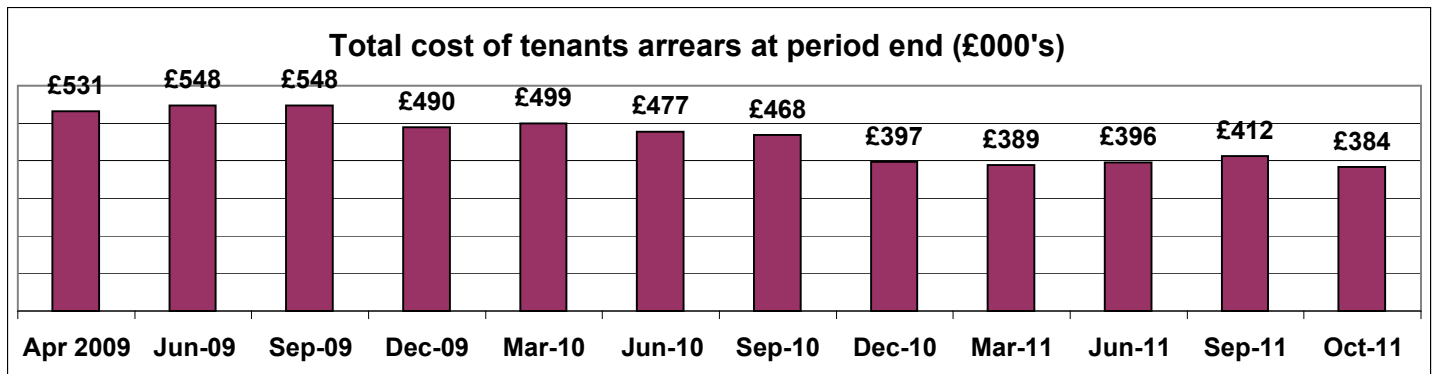
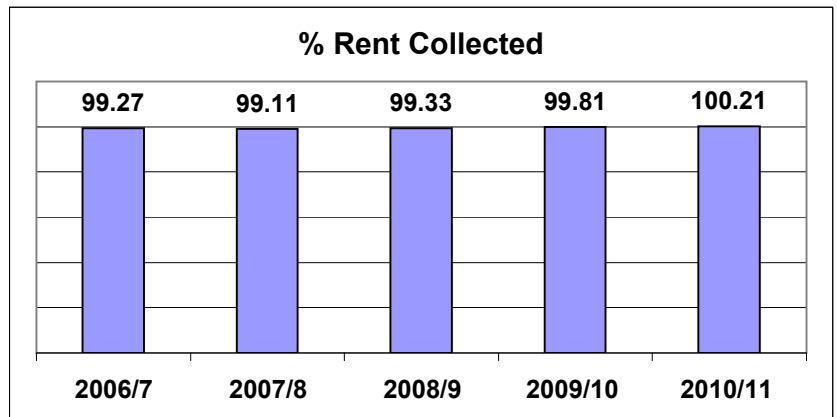
#### 5. COUNCIL HOUSING RENT COLLECTION & TENANTS ARREARS LEVELS

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

\* Total rent collected in 2011/12 to date from all council housing properties remains high. At the end of October 2011 the figure stood at 99.26%.

\* Garage rents collected this year to the end of October stood at 98% though void levels continue to rise.

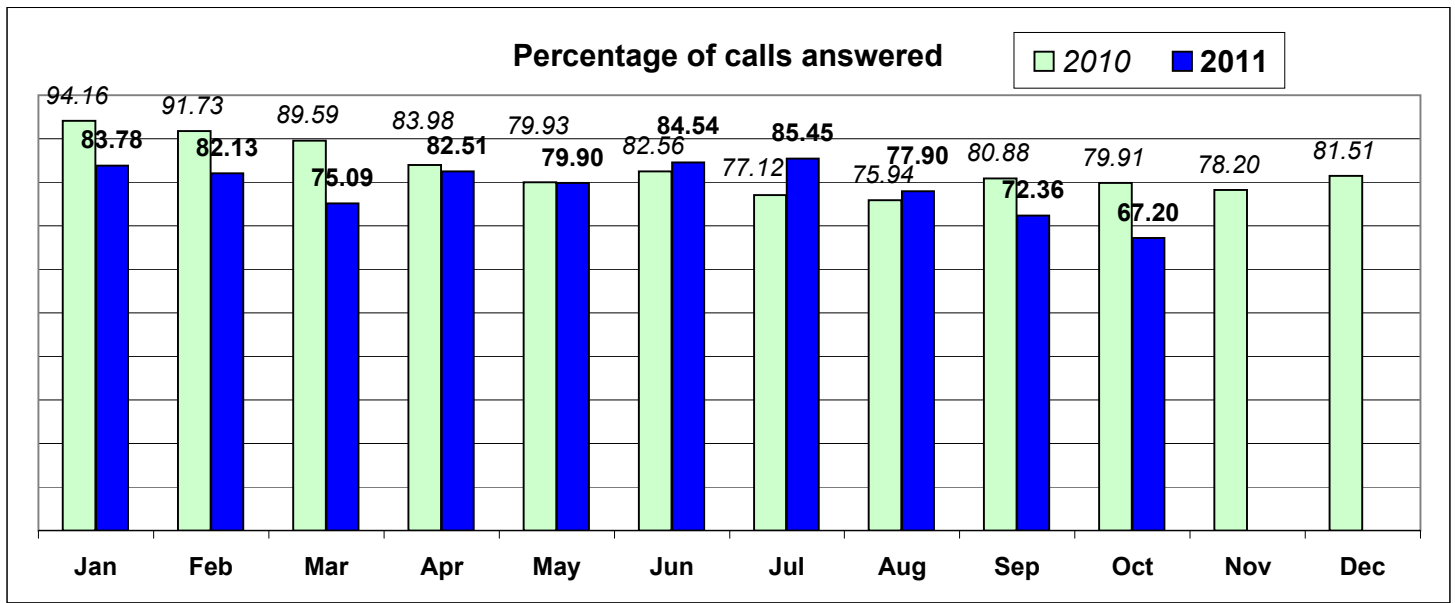
\* The levels of total tenants arrears during 2011/12 to the end of October remain stable and are lower than the same period last year.



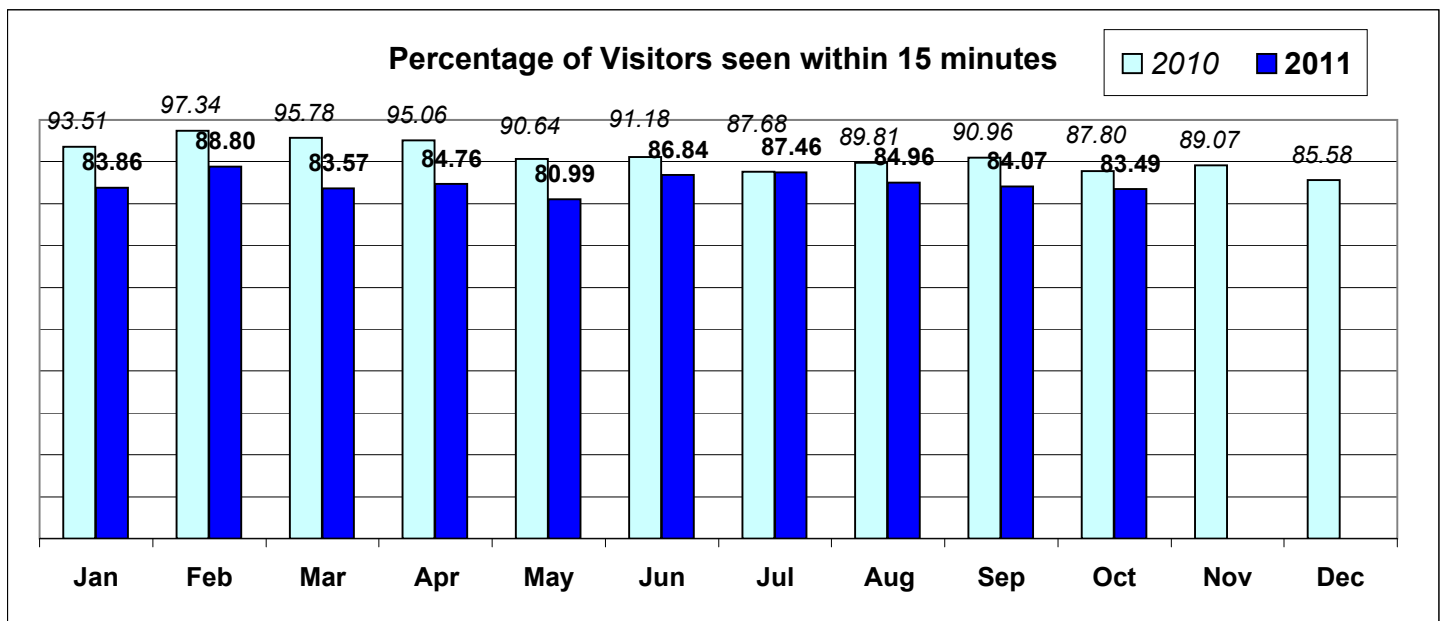
**6. CALL HANDLING AND VISITOR NUMBERS UPDATE (Owners Julie Rogers 01233 330856)**

Overall performance has suffered during the first few months of Gateway Plus operation and changes to access hours. We have identified a change in trends with busier days changing and are reviewing our staffing patterns to better reflect these changes. New targets are being introduced to reduce down transaction times as staff become more confident with systems and we are reviewing processes to try and reduce handling times.

\* Percentage of calls answered has decreased and abandonment rate have risen over the last couple of months in particular partly caused by increased number of enquiries and staff sickness. Average waiting times are increasing due in particular to the handling of summons and reminders which are particularly time consuming.



\* Higher visitor numbers and transaction times have impacted the percentage of visitors seen within 15 minutes. Though average wait times have only slightly decreased. Transaction times are increasing due to increased service coverage and the move from the Civic Centre. We are now noticing a downward trend in visitor numbers to the Civic Centre. However this may increase as new partners take up occupancy - Driving Standards Agency, Health Protection Agency, HR Revenue & Customs etc.

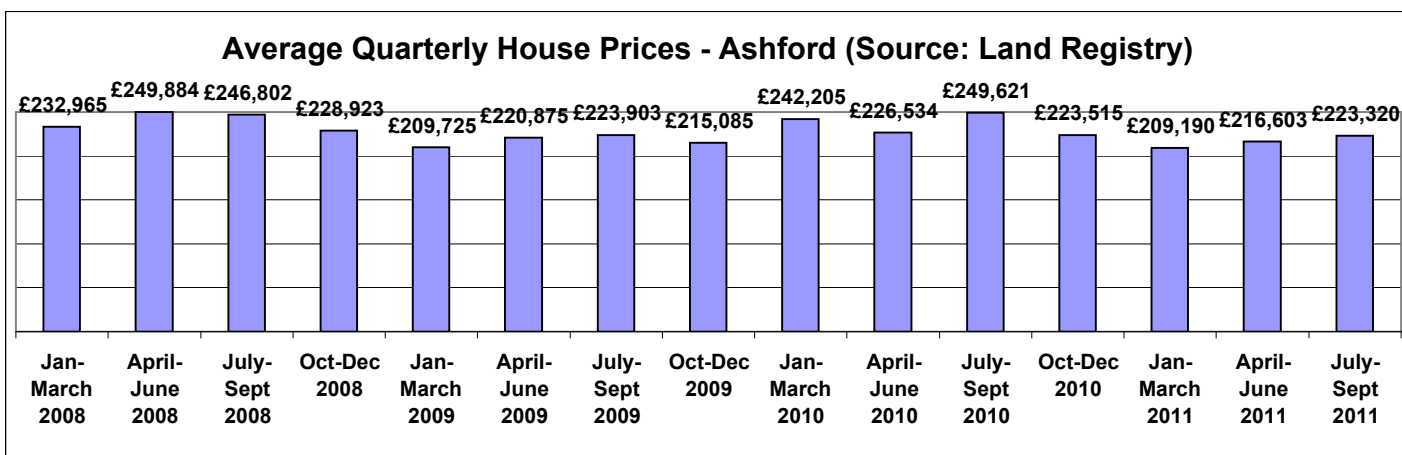


## 7. HOUSE PRICES IN ASHFORD (Owner Bob Smart 01233 330434)

\* Average house sales prices, sales numbers and percentage movements across Kent sourced from the Land Registry for the quarter July - September 2011 are summarised below. The average house price for Kent is now £244,393 a decrease in the year of 4.3%.

	Sales in quarter	Average price	% increase/-decrease quarter	% increase/-decrease annual	
Sevenoaks	433	£458,231	12.6	8.7	
Tunbridge Wells	486	£348,652	16.0	-2.4	
Tonbridge & Malling	471	£295,854	4.1	-0.2	Average house sales prices
Maidstone	583	£231,810	4.7	-7.5	in Ashford by property types are:
Canterbury	631	£227,938	-0.1	-8.1	Detached
<b>Ashford</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>£223,320</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>-10.5</b>	Semi-detached
Dartford	333	£208,076	2.6	-2.4	Terraced
Gravesham	273	£201,202	-7.5	-8.2	Flat/Maisonette
Shepway	437	£195,348	-3.1	-5.4	
Dover	446	£188,819	4.1	-9.7	
Swale	431	£176,142	-3.1	-6.4	
Thanet	537	£167,389	3.2	-6.6	

\* The quarterly average house sale price for Ashford since 2008 is highlighted below.



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

(Corporate Project: Lead Members Cllrs Wood and Hicks)

\* In 2010/11 a record 266 affordable properties were delivered in the Borough of Ashford. During the first 8 months of the 2011/12 financial year a further 106 were delivered of which 81 were for rent and 25 for shared ownership.

\* It is forecast that additional affordable properties will be delivered during the remainder of this financial year. This will include 30 properties at Hunter Avenue, which will complete the delivery of affordables on this site, plus 50 local authority new build units and 6 new Rural Local needs housing at Bilsington and Ruckinge.

