



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Housing Services Quarterly Performance Report

December 2009

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1. EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

*** Shared Service Vehicle (SSV) update (Owner Tracey Kerly 01233 330607)**

For a number of months we have been working on the potential of a SSV with the four East Kent Councils, Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet. The purpose of the project was to work collaboratively together to drive through improved customer service, assist us all in delivering a 3 star housing service and deliver efficiencies.

After a lot of discussion and analysis Ashford Borough Council has come to the conclusion that the project was not sufficiently radical and would not achieve the expected efficiencies for the risk that we were exposing ourselves to. The project would also have put different pressures on ABC than the other Councils as they are also contemplating other SSV's for their General Fund services and since Ashford works with the Mid-Kent partnership this in itself made it more difficult to pursue and achieve efficiency gains.

The most important issue for Ashford is that we now re-focus our operations as a Housing Provider, continue to work pro-actively on the 3 star improvement plan and demonstrate that we can take on the challenge ourselves to continue to drive efficiencies in our service to meet the growing challenges for Local Government in times of a recession.

*** Housing Benefit changes (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)**

With effect from 1 April 2010 the housing benefit subsidy levels for properties leased by the Council for temporary accommodation under the Private Sector Leasing (PSL) Scheme have been changed by the Government.

After an extensive review of the overall financial changes, which are in particular aimed at controlling the excesses of the London Boroughs, the changes for Ashford Borough Council are neutral.

*** New Build update (Owner Paul McKenner 01233 330419)**

Good progress continues to be made to make the opportunity to build new Council Housing in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) a reality.

Excellent progress on the selection of contractors for both round one and two bid rounds have resulted in high levels of interest. Due to the potential value of the contract for round two bids, an advertisement has been placed in the European Journal. Short listing for round one is now complete, from which four experienced, financially viable companies have been asked to tender against the requirements of the Council. Tenders are due back shortly after Christmas. The round two proposals and subject to funding being confirmed in December, will be split into two contracts to both minimise the risk and to ensure that all sites are delivered in accordance with the timetable.

Planning for the twelve sites in round 2 will be considered by the Planning Authority early in the new year, which fits with the timetable as set out in the European advert.

*** Bad Debt and Arrears Policy (Owner Rebecca Wilcox 01233 330233)**

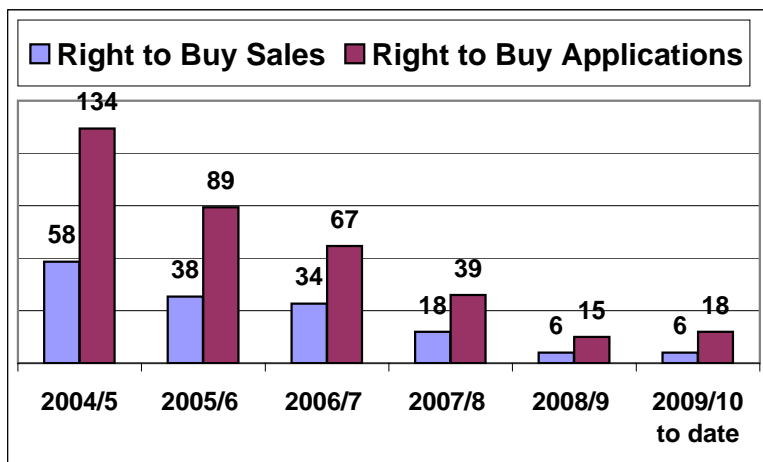
An internal review of bad debt provision across the HRA is underway with the objective of producing a draft policy document in the new year following consultation with the relevant groups in ABC including Finance, Housing Benefit and Internal Audit.

When finalised as a draft, an Executive report will be made available for Members to review and agree. The current aim is to implement for the new financial year 2010/11.

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

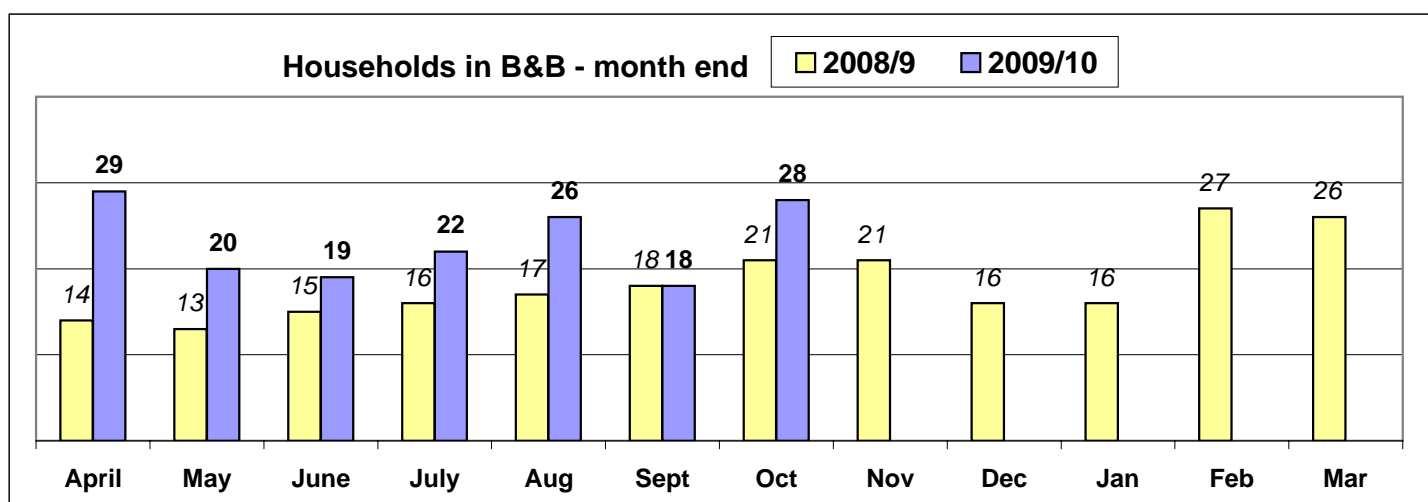
* Right to Buy applications continue to rise compared to last year with 18 applications to the end of October 2009 compared to 15 for the whole of the last financial year - a real low point.

* To the end of October, 6 Right to Buy properties were sold - compared with 6 for the last financial year. There is the potential for another couple in the new year. All properties sold have received the maximum discount of £38,000 each.

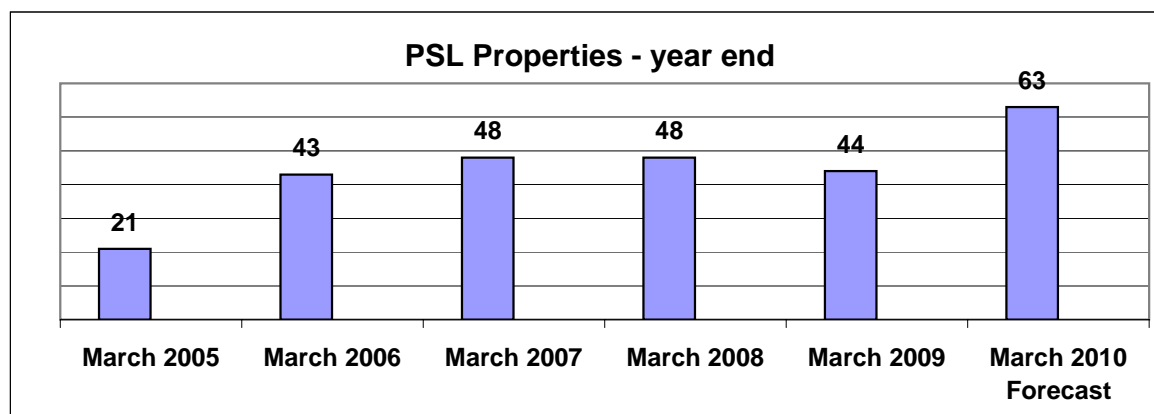


3. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION UPDATE (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

* At the end of October 2009 the numbers of Households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) stood at 28. The figures to date continue to run higher than last year and highlights the continuing pressure in this area. In the current economic climate it continues to be very difficult to forecast ahead with any certainty though the increase in the number of PSL properties to date should help to ensure that some of the growing pressure is contained.

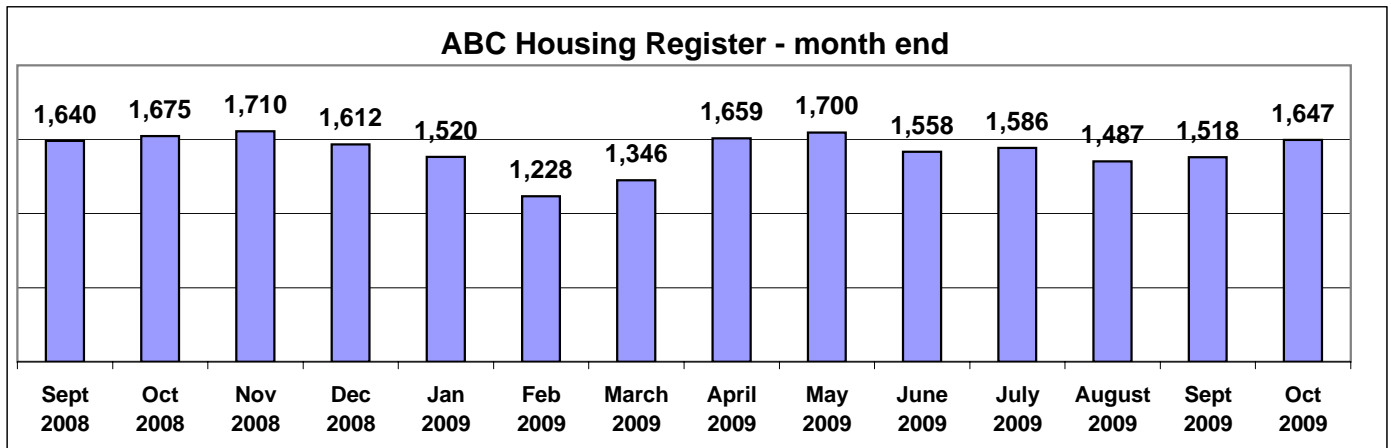


* Number of Private Sector Leasing (PSL) properties at the end of October had grown to 62. This is an increase of 18 (41%) over the year end figure at March 2009 of 44. The figure is currently planned to reach a maximum number of 63 shortly with this level being maintained during the next financial year.



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

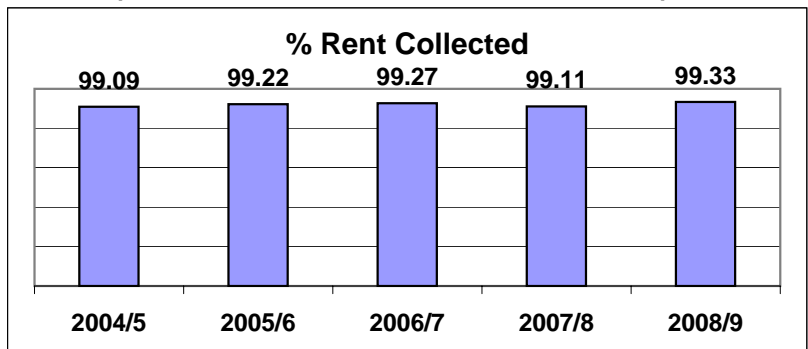
* Housing Register numbers at the end of October 2009 increased to 1,647, though are marginally lower than October last year. Waiting list times for successful council housing applicants has reduced to 11 months. Numbers housed via Choice Based Lettings (CBL) stood at 149 in the year to the end of October, virtually the same as in the same period last year.



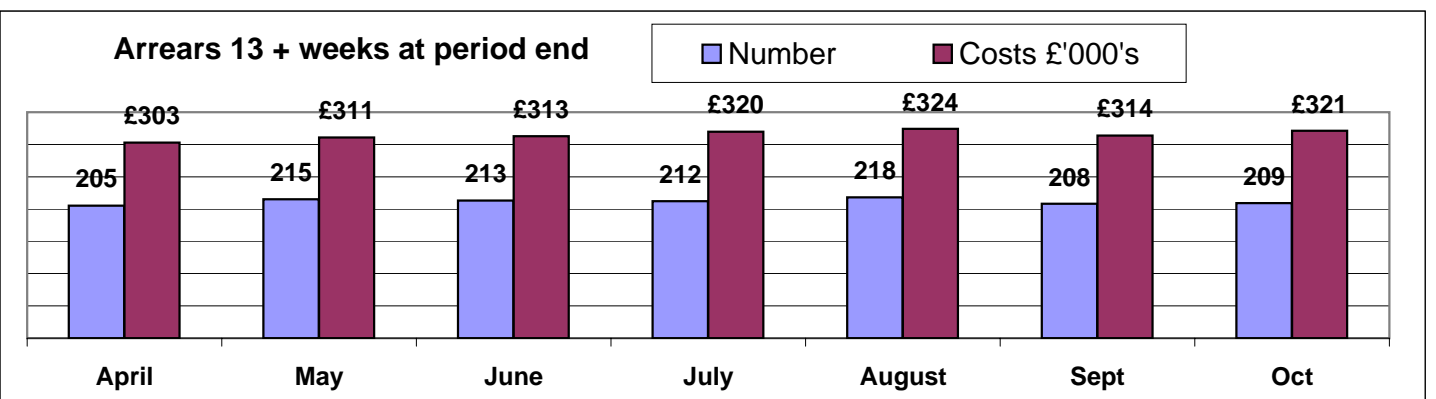
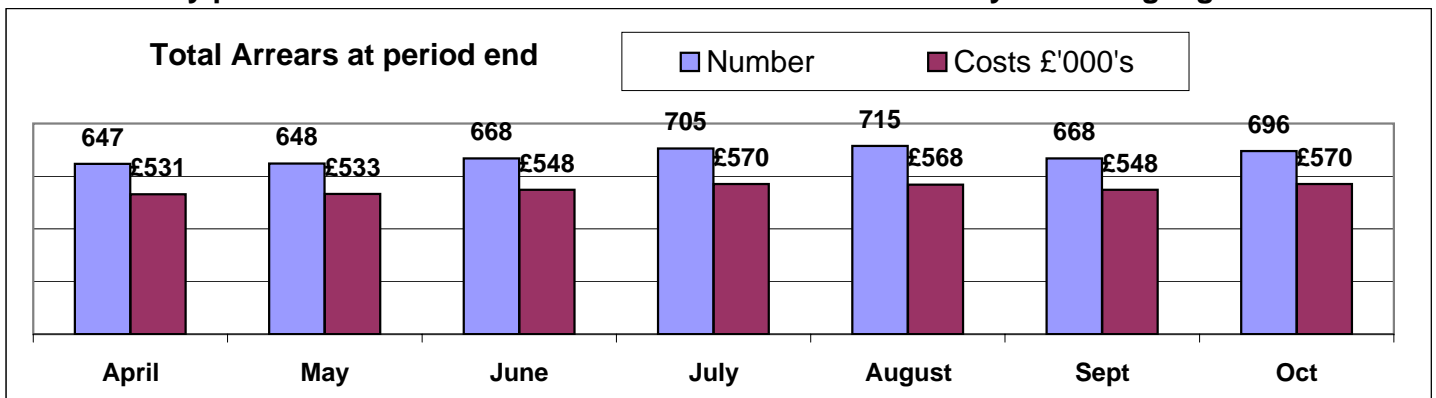
5. HRA RENT COLLECTION & ARREARS LEVELS (Owner Rebecca Wilcox 01233 330233)

* Total rent and charges collected from all HRA properties including Stanhope in Quarter 2 2009/10 remained high at 98.9%.

* To the end of October 2009 arrears levels have marginally risen both in financial terms + numbers of tenants. This reflects the current economic environment which is currently resulting in a small growth in new arrears at a low level.

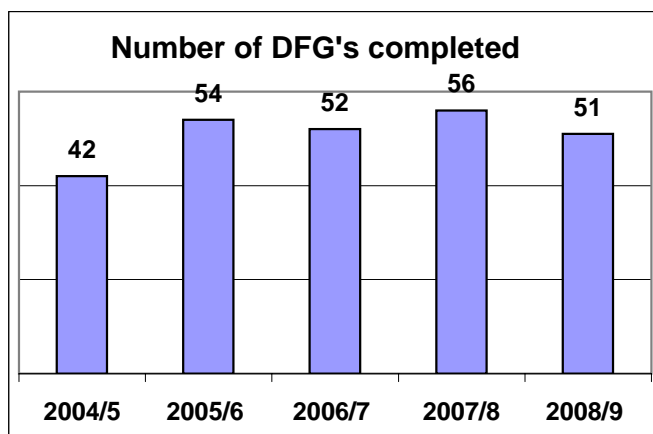
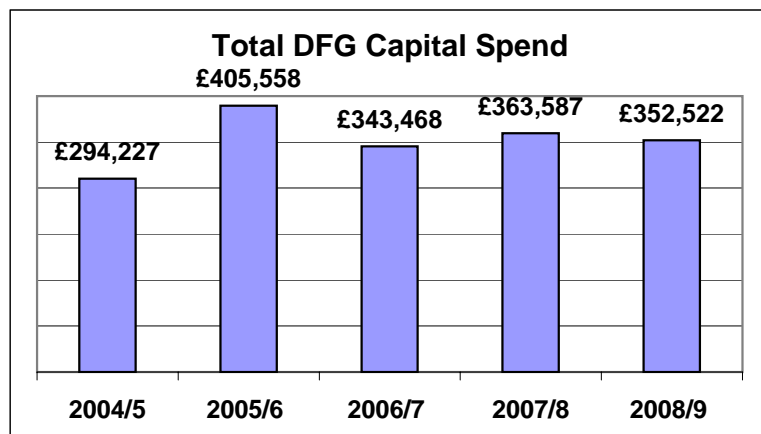


* The monthly position for total arrears and 13+ weeks this financial year are highlighted below:



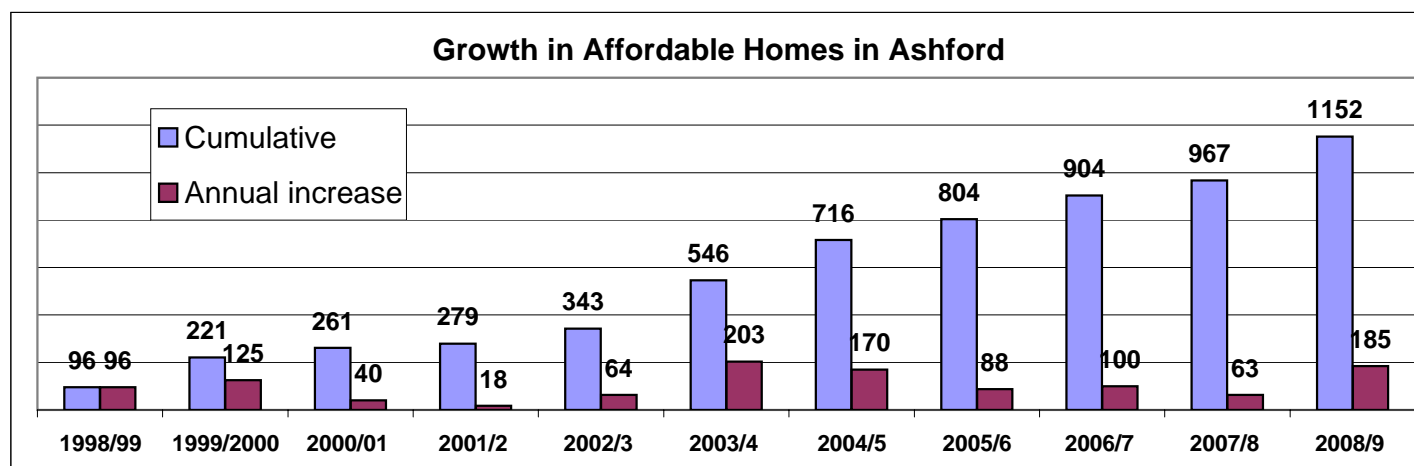
6. MANDATORY DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFG) (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

- * To the end of October 2009 34 DFG jobs had been completed at a total cost of £221,764 with a further £250,454 committed spend.
- * There are sufficient jobs completed/nearing completion in the pipeline to ensure a full programme of spend in the financial year.



7. AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN ASHFORD (Owner Jennifer Shaw 01233 330451)

- * To the end of October 2009 79 Affordable properties have been delivered to date this financial year, including 60 for rent. In October the numbers increased by 36 reflecting the delivery of properties at Joseph Hadlum Court, the extra care scheme, delivered as part of the better homes, active lives PFI with Kent County Council.
- * 12 units of local needs housing & flats are due for completion in December in Smarden, with another 12 units of local needs due in Rolvenden in February next year. Both schemes will be using renewable energy technology - ground source heat pumps. A further 11 units of local needs properties are due in June 2010 in Chilham.



APPENDIX

Mortgage Rescue Scheme (Owner Vicky Hammond 01233 330807)

The Mortgage Rescue Scheme is a national Government Scheme that has been set up to help prevent vulnerable homeowners from losing their homes.

To qualify, a household must be in 'priority need', living in a mortgaged home valued at no more than c£225K and with a household income of less than £60K and have exhausted all other 'hardship tools'.

Initially the Local Authority must refer the client for debt advice for an assessment of a client's suitability for the scheme. The debt advisor should then refer the client back to the Local Authority to visit the client, gather all information and refer them to Moat Housing who will look to purchase the property from the owner at market value. The home would then be rented back to the client at approximately 80% market value with an option after 3 years for the client to purchase back their home.

The following table highlights the number of clients that have approached ABC's Housing Options Officers for advice on Mortgage Rescue, the number of referrals made and the number of Mortgage Rescues completed to the end of October 2009.

	Referred for debt advice	Referred to Moat Housing for Mortgage Rescue	Mortgage Rescue Completed
February	4		
March	4	1	
April	10	1	
May	4	1	
June	1		
July	0		
August	1		
September	4		1
October	5		
Total to date	33	3	1