

Housing Services

Quarterly Performance Report – July 2010



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

July 2010

Contents:

1. Executive Highlights
2. Right to Buys (RTB)
3. Temporary Accommodation update
4. Housing Register numbers
5. HRA Rent Collection & Arrears levels
6. Eviction Levels
7. Mandatory Disabled Facilities
Grants (DFG)
8. Affordable Housing in Ashford
9. House Prices in Ashford

Issue date: 24 June 2010

Author: Bob Smart

Authorised: Tracey Kerly

1. EXECUTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

*** Government funding cuts and the impact on Housing (Owner Tracey Kerly 01233 330607)**

Announcements on future funding levels and associated cuts are currently being announced almost on a daily basis. The impact on the Housing Service in Ashford will be reported at a future date in this quarterly report once the position has settled down and the overall picture for the future is clearer. However it is important to flag up to Members that we expect there to be a negative impact on the service, both for the General Fund activities and the council housing ringfenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Details of any changes to Housing Benefit rules will also be included were they impact on the Housing Service.

*** Local Authority New Build programme (Owner Paul McKenner 01233 330419)**

The Council has now entered into contract with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for the six sites for Round 1 and the HRA has confirmed that the grant allocation for Round 2 sites are committed and as such would not be part of the Government spending review plans. Furthermore, regional HCA colleagues have indicated a strong preference for small infill sites, such as the sites for Round 1 and 2, to come forward as a part of the single conversation debate with them.

Round 1 update - The Council has appointed Denne Construction to construct 5 new homes across the borough and to convert the former scheme managers house at Gerlach House into 2 self contained flats. Good progress has been made with the contractor to develop the detailed drawings to enable the foundation work to start that will enable the sites to reach practical completion by March 2011.

Round 2 update - The Housing service continues to progress planning applications for 11 sites which were agreed by the Executive earlier this year. Two sites have already been approved by the Planning Committee with a further 5 applications to be considered in June with the remaining sites in July. There has been a number of changes to the original proposals for the sites from what was previously reported to the Executive, where a number of units/bed spaces have been lost as the emerging design solution for each site been progressed. A fuller report on the proposals together with a detailed report on the sites will be reported to Members in August 2010.

6 shortlisted companies have been selected for the Round 2 sites and will be out to competitive tender in early July. The evaluation process will be undertaken jointly by the Ashford Tenants Forum and officers with an objective to select the contractors by early September to enable completion by March 2012.

*** Leaseholder Charges (Owner Chris Tillin 01233 330483)**

A paper on the introduction of an annual Leaseholder Management fee is going to the July Executive for approval. This is the first time that the recover of costs for the service provided to leaseholders has been actioned, in accordance with Leaseholder legislation, and will amount to an average bill of £59 - just over a pound a week. Please refer to the separate Executive report for more information including a breakdown of the bill for 2010/11.

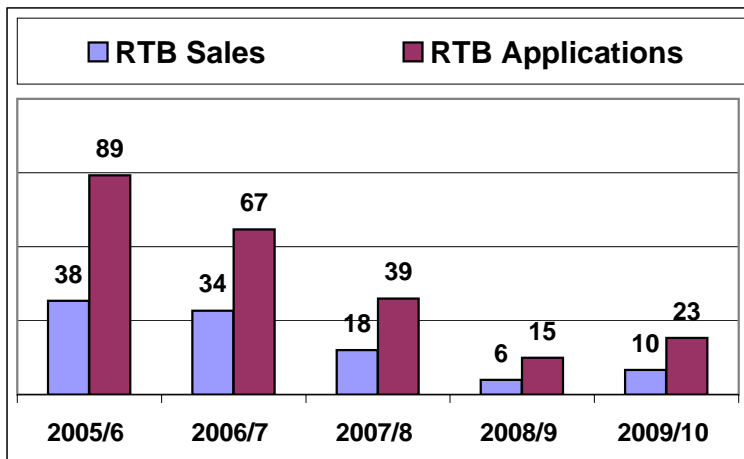
*** HRA Subsidy Review (Owner Bob Smart 01233 330434)**

Following approval at the June Executive, the response to the latest consultation paper will be made by the 6 July deadline. Grant Shapps, Minister for Housing and Local Government stated on 7 June that the Government will carry on with the existing HRA review.

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

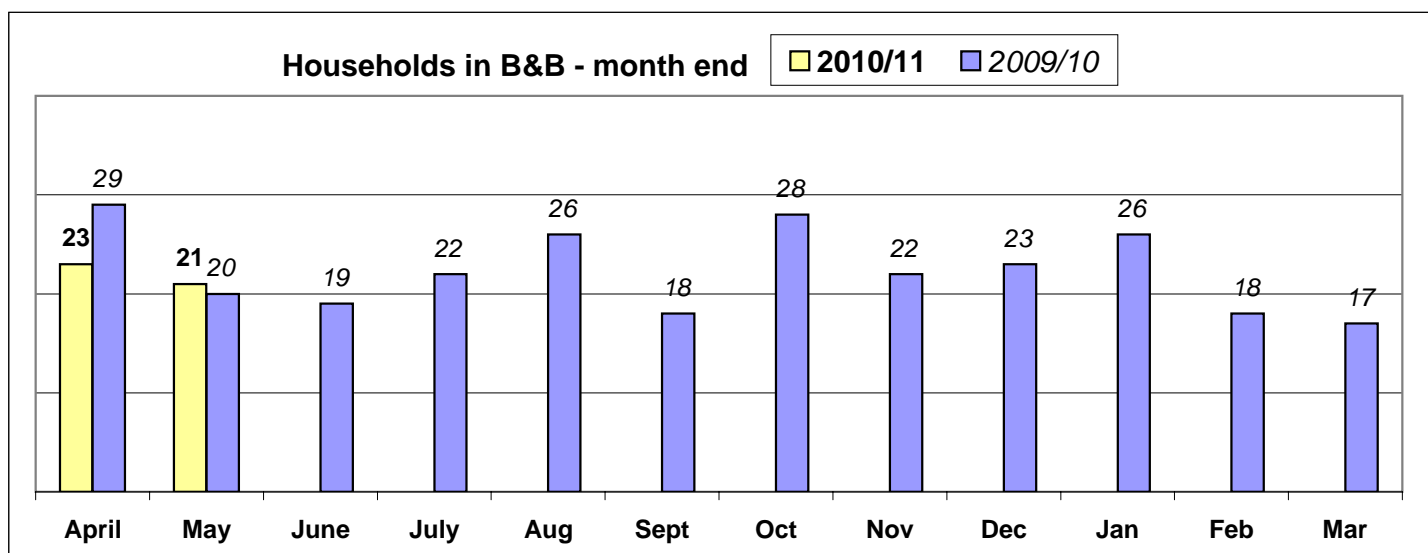
* In 2009/10 there were 10 council properties sold under Right to Buy. This was higher than in the previous year. In the first three months of the new financial year 2 council property have been sold.

* 2008/9 was the low point for applications and sales. Applications continue to slowly rise, with 23 last year. At the end of May 4 applications had been received in Housing. We are currently forecasting a similar level of applications and sales for this year as for last year.

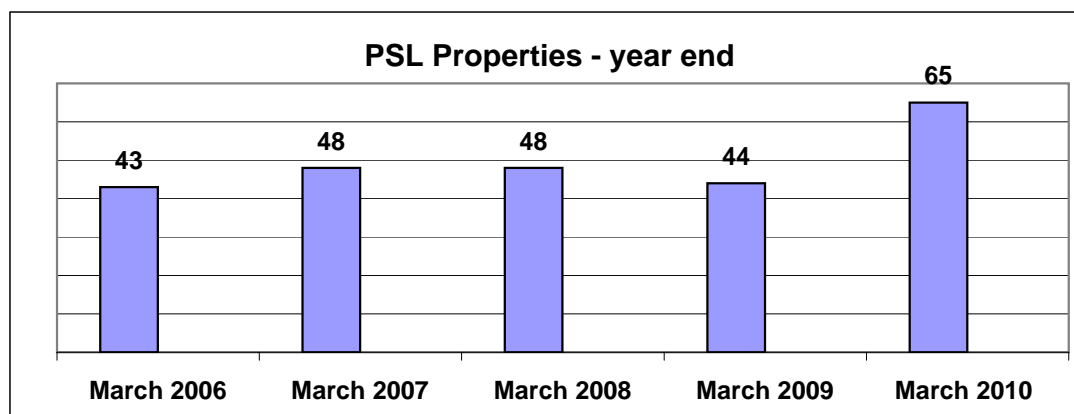


3. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION UPDATE (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

* At the end of May 2010 the numbers of Households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) was 21. Month end numbers are currently running broadly at the same rate as in the last financial year. In the current economic climate it continues to be very difficult to forecast ahead with any certainty. This area remains a potential pressure point for the Council and the General Fund going forward.

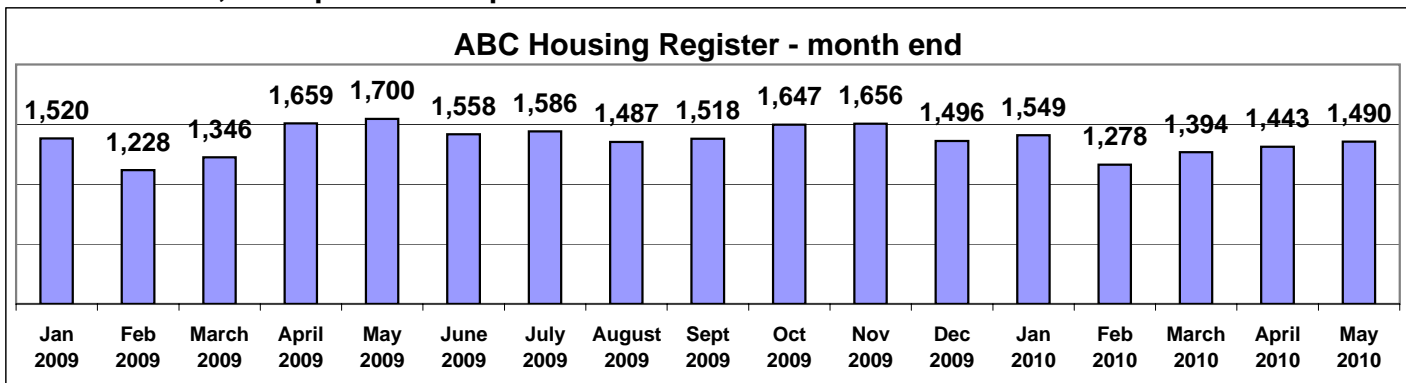


* Number of Private Sector Leasing (PSL) properties at the end of May stood at 64. This is marginally lower than years end - which was 65. Currently consideration is being given to potentially increase the numbers to 70 during the new financial year to meet demand. The contribution from PSL continues to support the preventative agenda in Ashford.

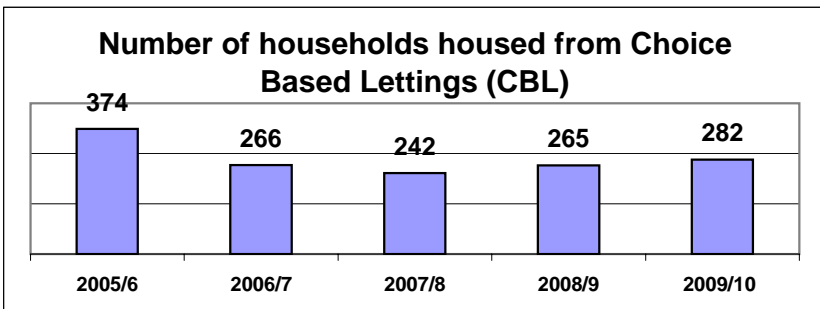


4. HOUSING REGISTER AND CBL NUMBERS (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

* Housing Register numbers at the end of May 2010 stood at 1,490, marginally higher than year end at 1,394 but lower than last year. Average over the year has reduced to around 1,500 a month from 1,550 reported last quarter.



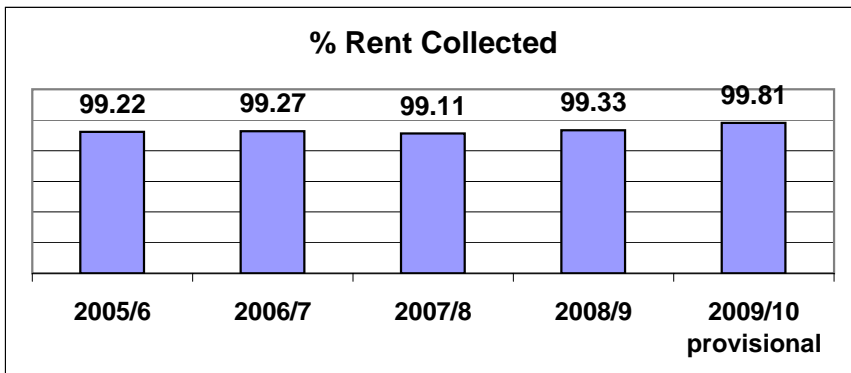
* Numbers housed via Choice Based Lettings (CBL) during last year increased to 282 - up by 6%. In the first two months of this year 39 households were housed via CBL.



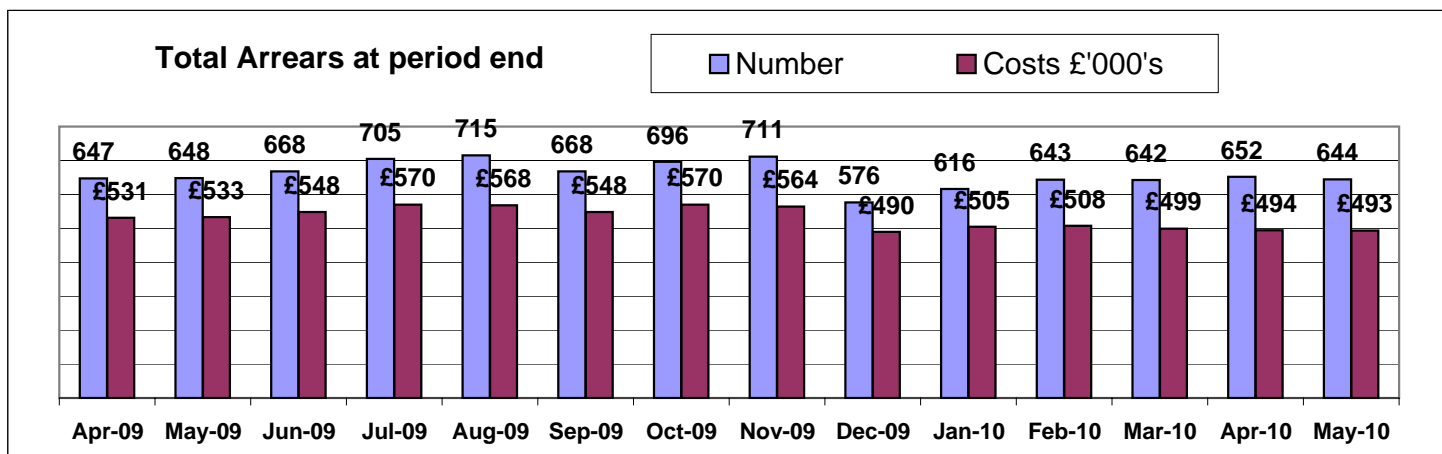
5. HRA RENT COLLECTION & ARREARS LEVELS (Owners Jean Williams - rents 01233 330426 and Rebecca Wilcox - arrears 01233 330233)

* Provisional numbers for total rent and charges collected last year from all HRA properties was 99.81% - continuing the high collection levels of recent years.

* At the end of March 2010, the percentage of tenants on full or partial Housing Benefit (HB) stood at 65%. This figure has remained broadly unchanged over the past year.



* At year end arrears levels had marginally reduced both in costs and in the numbers of tenants. This is a better picture than anticipated by many a year ago. Financial costs has continued to marginally reduce during the first 2 months of the new year.

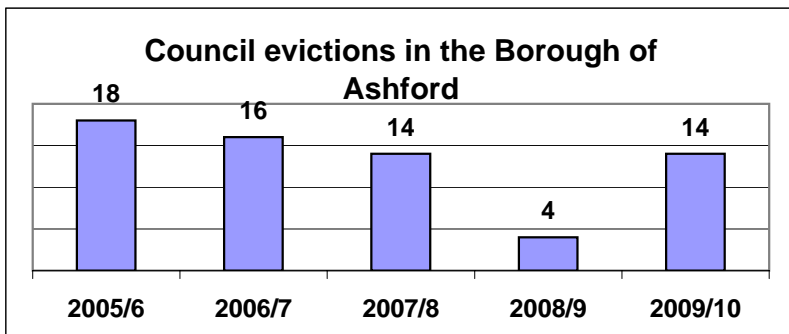


6. EVICTION LEVELS (Owner Rebecca Wilcox 01233 330233)

* There were 14 council evictions carried out during 2009/10. Though the number was higher than in the previous year, it is consistent with the historical trend. The low figure for 2008/9 was due in particular to court leniency reflecting the economic environment and last resort status of Local Authority housing.

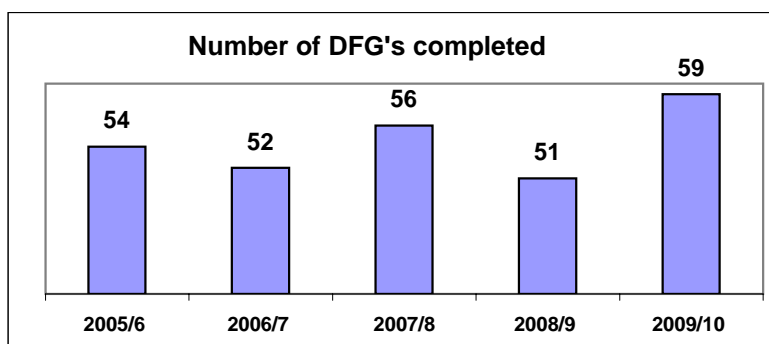
* Of last years evictions the majority, 11 were due to rent arrears, 1 for breach of tenancy and 2 from PSL's.

* Eviction levels in Ashford remain historically low compared to the national picture. ABC has more than 5,000 council properties and evictions are a last resort.

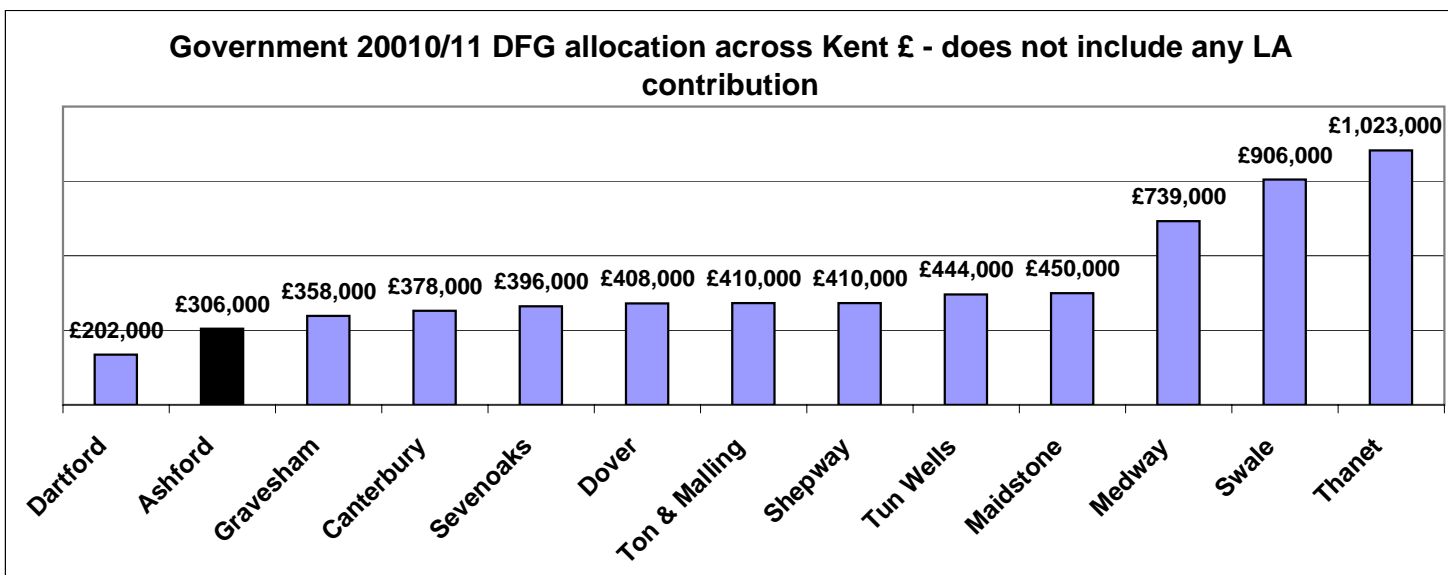


7. MANDATORY DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFG) (Owner Sharon Williams 01233 330803)

* During the last financial year the total number of completed DFG jobs increased to 59 at a provisional cost of just over £400,000. Though this is a historic high reflecting higher capital funding, longer term funding remains a national issue due to growing demand & ageing population.



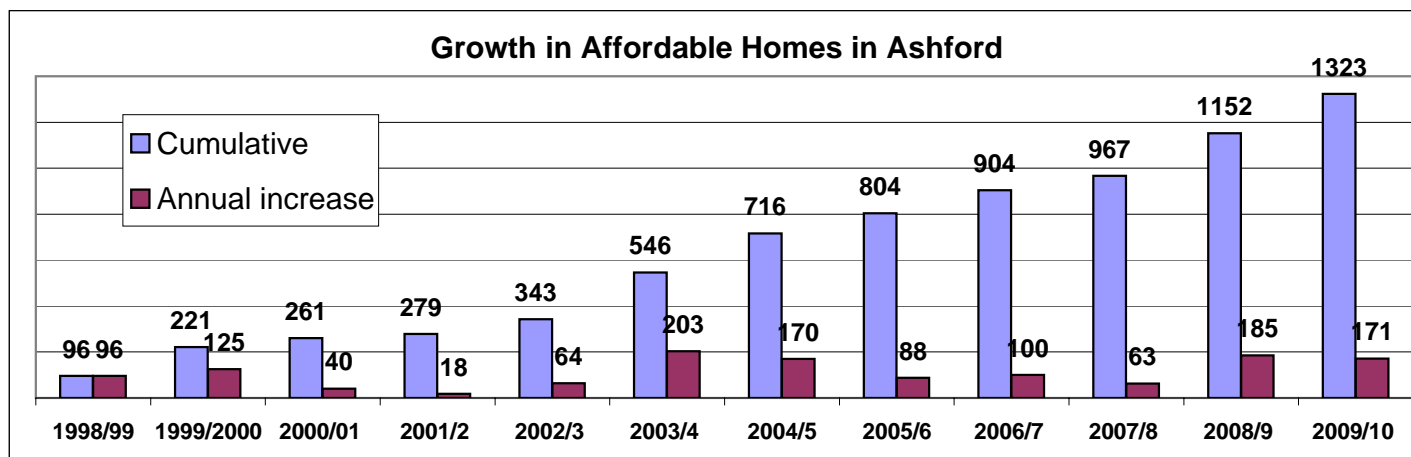
* Details of the DFG capital allocations from CLG for 2010/11 were finally issued on 1st April. The CLG allocations for 2010/11 across Kent, including Medway are highlighted below. These funding figures exclude any contributions from Council capital funds. Ashford's allocation from CLG was unchanged from last year at £306,000.



* Allocation levels are driven in particular by the "need indicator" calculation which is based on numbers in receipt of Disabled Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

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

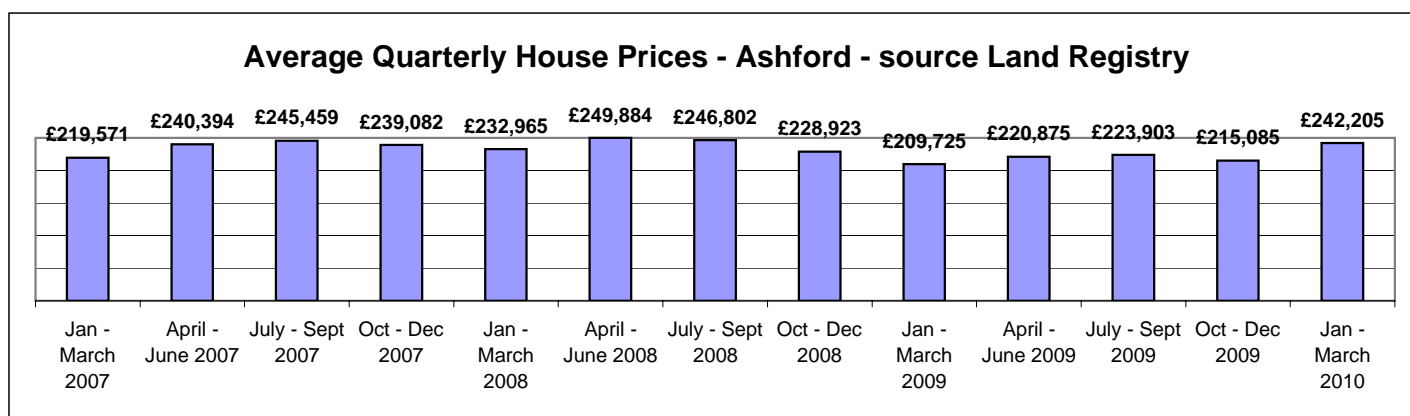
* During the last financial year 171 Affordable properties were delivered, of which 110 were for rent. In the first 3 months of 2010/11 a further 64 affordables were delivered.



* A summary update on Local Authority New Build is included in the Executive Highlights with an update report due to the Executive in August 2010.

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

* Average house sales prices in Ashford sourced from the Land Registry data for the quarter Jan to March 2010 rose by 16% in the year, increasing the average sale price to £242,205. This is the highest house price Jan-March quarter on record.



* Average house sales prices and annual percentage increases across Kent, including Medway are reported below:

	Average	% annual sale price increase	Average house sales prices in Ashford by property types are:	
Sevenoaks	£377,663	25.6%	Detached	£358,939
Tunbridge Wells	£343,249	28.0%	Semi-detached	£200,161
Tonbridge & Malling	£287,464	27.5%	Terraced	£172,243
Ashford	£242,205	15.5%	Flat/Maisonette	£126,778
Canterbury	£226,444	17.7%		
Maidstone	£221,577	8.0%		
Gravesham	£211,581	29.9%		
Shepway	£205,310	9.9%		
Dover	£197,430	21.1%		
Dartford	£196,987	1.0%		
Swale	£171,667	6.1%		
Thanet	£169,490	9.7%		
Medway	£168,221	8.3%		