

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 15/06/2017

Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2016/17 & The Annual Report

Report Author & Job Title: Nicholas Clayton-Peck, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Clarkson, Cllr Knowles & Cllr Shorter
Portfolio Holder for: Leader, Human Resources and Customer Services & Finance and IT



Summary: This report seeks to update members and the public on the performance of the Council against its Corporate Plan during Quarter 4 2016/17. This includes information on what the Cabinet has achieved through its decision-making, key performance data, and consideration of the wider borough picture which impacts upon the Council's work.

The organisation's approach to the monitoring of its performance against this plan has been revised. Accordingly, attached are summary highlights from the online Performance 'Dashboard' for each of the Council's Corporate Plan areas.

The report also includes the council's Annual Report, and details of how this will be presented digitally on the Council's website.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: N/A

Recommendations: The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- I. **Note the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan in Quarter 4 of 2016/17.**
- II. **Approve and endorse the Annual Report**

Policy Overview: In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*".

This also provided an opportunity to refresh the way in which performance against this new Corporate Plan (and its priority

areas) was measured, presented and engaged with by officers and members.

Financial Implications: N/A

Legal Implications N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment Not required because the report relates to a summary of past performance rather than any item requiring decision.

Other Material Implications: N/A

Exempt from Publication: NO

Background Papers: N/A

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Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 4 2016/17 & The Annual Report

Introduction

1. The report seeks to provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 4 2016/17.
2. This report provides a summary of the main developments affecting performance during the quarter, whilst the attached highlight summaries provide the key trend data underlying this (**Appendix 1**).
3. As this is also the end-of-year performance report, it also includes the council's Annual Report. This year the report will be hosted online for the first time, available to read alongside an interactive timeline of the achievements made against the corporate plan over the last year, and links to further information held elsewhere.

Background

4. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees receive an update on how and how well the Council is achieving its objectives.
5. In December 2015 the Council agreed a new Corporate Plan - "*The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement*". This provided an opportunity to refresh the way in which performance against this new Corporate Plan (and its priority areas) was monitored, presented and engaged with by officers and members.
6. Whilst this approach is naturally an evolving one, the aim is for this Performance Dashboard (the Dashboard) to inform the work of both officers and members, providing an ongoing tool which facilitates insight and understanding across the organisation on the state of progress against our goals.
7. As part of the Council's wider governance arrangements, such performance information is used to reflect on the organisation's approach – leading to doing things differently where needed in order to offer efficient services and effective outcomes. As such, in September 2016 the Dashboard was also presented to the Audit Committee.

Summary of Performance Developments in Quarter 4 2016/17

Activity

8. Quarter 4 saw successful activity on a variety of initiatives which will have a positive impact on the outcomes set out in the Council's corporate plan –

January

- a. DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county. The borough's recycling rate of 53.1%, also makes it the 44th best recycling local authority in the country. To tackle a number of contamination issues which, if left unresolved, might impact upon future recycling rates, Cabinet approved a range of communication activities designed to improve the recycling performance in the borough.
- b. Work began at the Commercial Quarter (CQ38) site, the first phase of which will see 80,500 sq ft of office space developed, along with retail and restaurants - whilst opposite the Ashford College building is near completion, and will welcome its first intake of students this September.
- c. Construction works commenced on the new community centre at Repton Park, with the building programmed for opening in January 2018.

February

- d. Following receipt and independent examination of the business case, Cabinet and Full Council decided to no longer pursue discussions on the proposed creation of a single East Kent district council. The Council still retains the flexibility to consider working with the other authorities and partners throughout Kent or those outside the county in the future.
- e. Work commenced on the construction of 34 sheltered scheme apartments for local residents and 4 bungalows for private sale at Danemore, Tenterden.
- f. Cabinet agreed a range of measures to improve the quality of the water at Conningbrook Lakes and Country Park. The investment of up to £150,000 will ensure the ongoing establishment of the lake as a key water facility for the borough for the enjoyment of the many clubs who regularly use it.
- g. Full funding for the Ashford spurs signalling project was secured, being awarded £4.8m from the Local Growth Fund, and will leverage an additional £112m in private sector funding.
- h. 'One You', the new health shop, opened in Park Mall, Ashford. The new health shop encourages people to quit smoking, lose weight and be more active. Services will include: stop smoking support, healthy weight advice for adults and children, on-the-spot blood pressure checks, a weigh-in service plus support and advice on a range of lifestyle issues.
- i. Stagecoach launched a fleet of new Mercedes buses across Ashford, called 'Little and Often'.

March

- j. Clarion Housing Group completed a deal for Conningbrook Lakes site. The new development of around 300 homes will comprise two, three, four and five bedroom houses, as well as a small number of apartments, all for private sale. This deal will also lead to developer payments being made to the Council for investment in the Country Park facilities.
- k. Council representatives and developers behind the Chilmington Green development agreed and signed the section 106 agreement, whilst a similar agreement was also signed to expand the Ashford Cineworld - meaning that planning permission to develop an IMAX can be issued.
- l. The planning department received and decided upon just over 300 applications during the quarter, and the Planning Committee considered almost 20 applications, including -
 - Granting outline planning permission for up to 25 homes in Smarden
 - Granting outline planning permission for up to 28 homes in Willesborough

Commentary on performance trends

- 9. Whilst the majority of the trends captured within the summaries attached to this report have remained broadly steady over the last quarter, the following trends are worth highlighting –
 - a. Footfall at the start of the calendar year reflected the slight downturn seen in the previous year, and more generally footfall has increased over the last couple of months. Other than in January, performance over the last six months has remaining stable at +/- 5% of the around 4,250 daily average visitors.
 - b. Vacancy rates for both the high street and Ashford's shopping centres have fallen over the last year, and have stabilised at a lower level of around 9%.
 - c. The overall unemployment rate has increased in the last quarter, reflecting a more general increase since February 2016. Unemployment amongst the 18-24 year olds continues to rise from 3% to 3.5% in the same period – and is still above the average seen across the rest of the county.
 - d. By the end of the quarter the number of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) had risen to 25, although the average for the quarter was only slightly higher than the previous quarter's 20. The overall trend, however, has remained steadily increasing since the beginning of 2016.
 - e. Across the over 1,000 food businesses across the borough, the percentage compliant with hygiene standards when inspected has remained stable over the last six months, remaining within half a percent during that period and on a generally slightly upward curve.

People Serving People – The Annual Report, 2016/17

10. The Annual Report (**Appendix 2**) provides a transparent and accessible summary of the achievements and milestones of Ashford Borough Council over the course of the 2016/17 financial year. Production of an Annual Report offers another means by which the Council can embrace the transparency agenda and provide a high-level reflection on the previous financial year.
11. The production of an annual report also forms a crucial part of the council's overall arrangements to demonstrate good governance and accountability. The revised 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' framework, produced by CIPFA and SOLACE, published in April 2016, notes that such reporting demonstrates good practices in reporting, openness and engagement to deliver effective accountability.
12. It had previously been agreed that the last year would be the final iteration to be printed and delivered across the borough. Accordingly, this year's report will be made available through a dedicated page on the website in digital copy, alongside the interactive timeline and links to further information. This page will go live in early July following Full Council.

Conclusions

13. The majority of performance goals the council is working towards remain either on-target or near-target, and (a) to (e) above demonstrate a continuing healthy growth profile for Ashford.
14. As noted above, the information included within these reports provide merely a high-level snapshot of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site and interactive Annual Report page.

Equalities Impact Assessment

15. N/A

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

16. N/A

Other Options Considered

17. N/A

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

18. N/A

Portfolio Holder's Views

19. To come.

Contact and Email

20. Nicholas Clayton-Peck, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer,
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Appendix 1



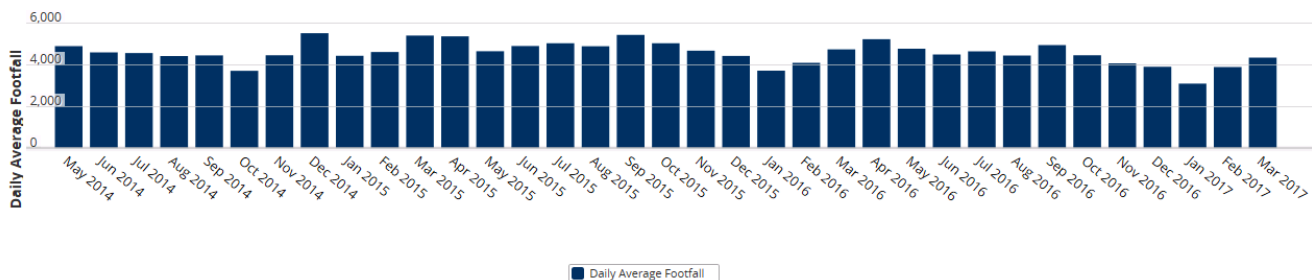
ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

Headline Report

Enterprising Ashford

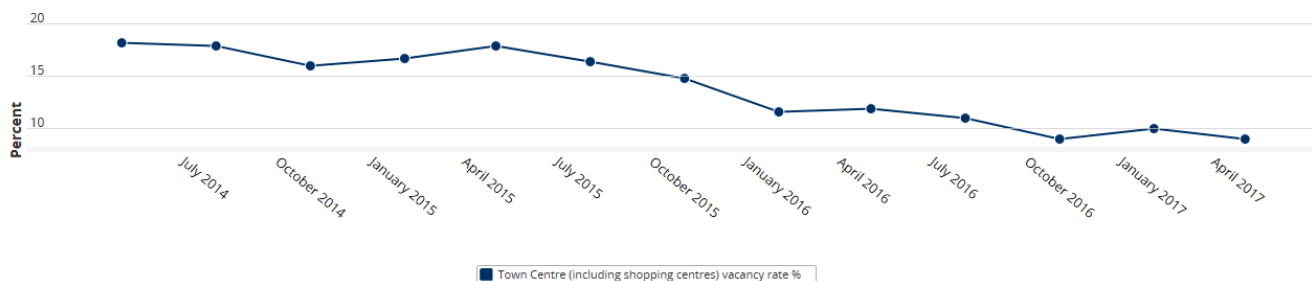
Town Centre Footfall



Footfall at the start of the calendar year reflected a slight downturn an uptick seen in the previous year, and more generally footfall has generally increased over the last couple of months.

In January 2017 work began at the Commercial Quarter (CQ38) site, the first phase of which will see 80,500 sq ft of office space developed, along with retail and restaurant.

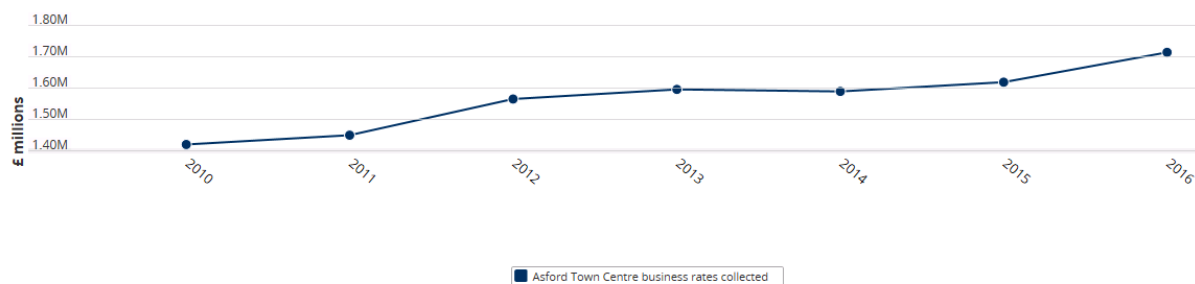
Ashford Town Centre Vacancy Rates



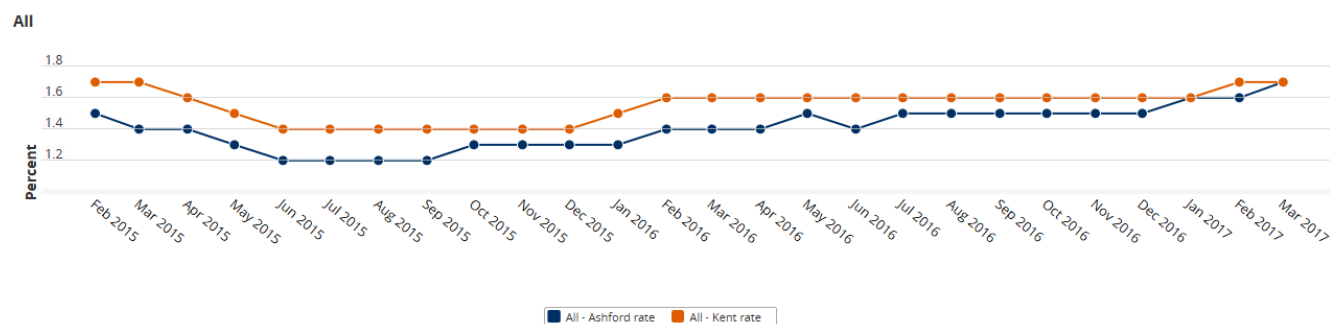
The latest vacancy rate is just under 9%. This is below the national average of 9.5%, and is the lowest since rates were first recorded in 2008.

Vacancy rates have fallen across the town centre overall over the last year. Park Mall's historically higher rates have also begun to fall since the Council took over direct operations in 2015, with over half of the vacant units now full and footfall up by around **7%**. The rejuvenation has been directly attributed with improving customer spend in neighbouring stores such as Wilko.

Town Centre Development and Future Plans

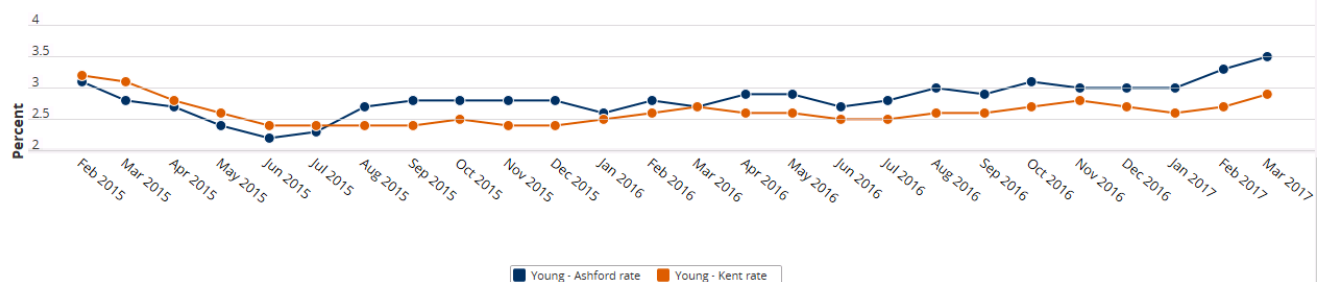


Unemployment



Following a long period of relatively stable levels, the total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed has increased slightly over the last quarter, and now stands at just under **1,300**. This is around 15% more than at the same time last year, constituting around **1.7%** of Ashford's working age population.

Young People



The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit has also risen slightly to around **320**, and remains higher than the Kent average.

Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

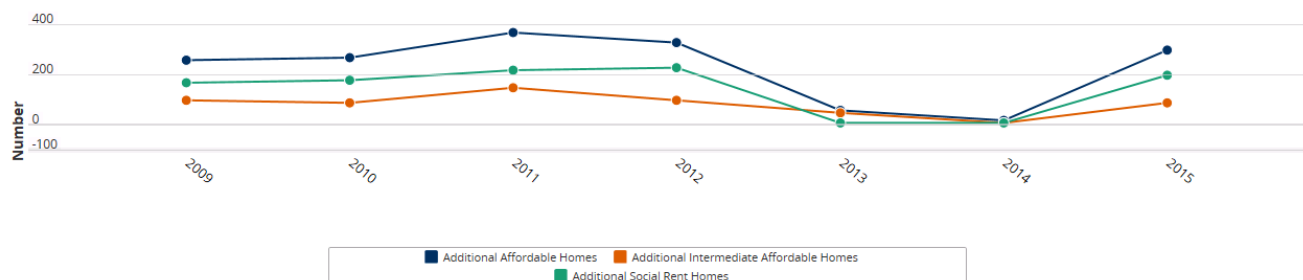
Headline Report

Living Ashford

Affordable Housing

The total additional Affordable Homes is made up of the following two main areas -

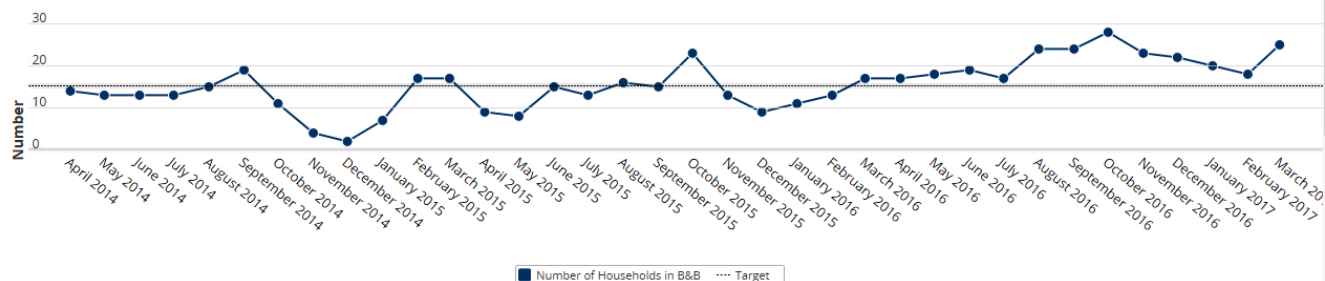
- Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
- Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



The economic downturn that occurred in 2008 had negative consequences for the housing market, though impacts for affordable housing completions were not felt until later - with a low point occurring in 2013. This position has since somewhat reversed.

In 2016 Cabinet approved a set of revised eligibility criteria to widen the scope of affordable housing delivery in the Borough to meet local housing needs. This will allow for a wider range of models to be considered in the future whilst maintaining quality development and management, opening up opportunities to explore alternative delivery models to boost supply where traditional forms of affordable housing delivery may not be viable.

Temporary Accommodation

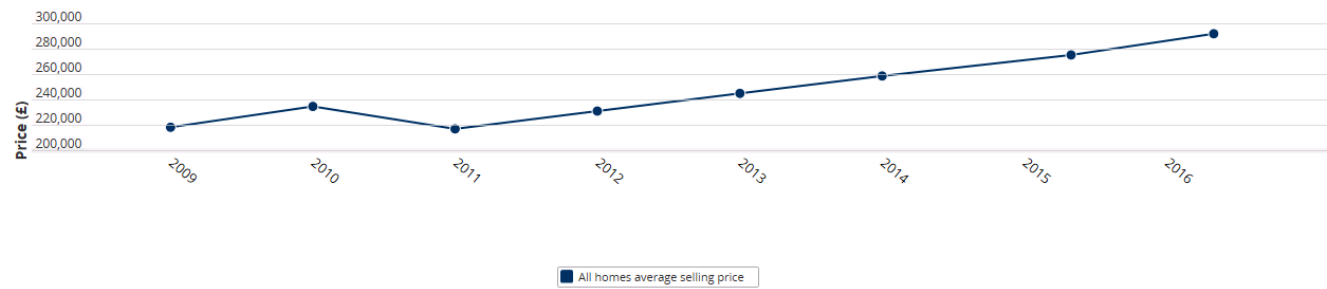


By the end of the quarter the average number of households in Bed & Breakfast (B&B) had increased to around **25**, (although there was a similar increase at the same time last year).

In response, in October Cabinet agreed to incorporate the findings of a recent consultation to inform and approve a new Homelessness Strategy. This Strategy sets a 10-point action plan to address local challenges. These include not placing any 16 or 17 year olds in B&B accommodation and enhancing prevention work and engagement across the private and public sectors.

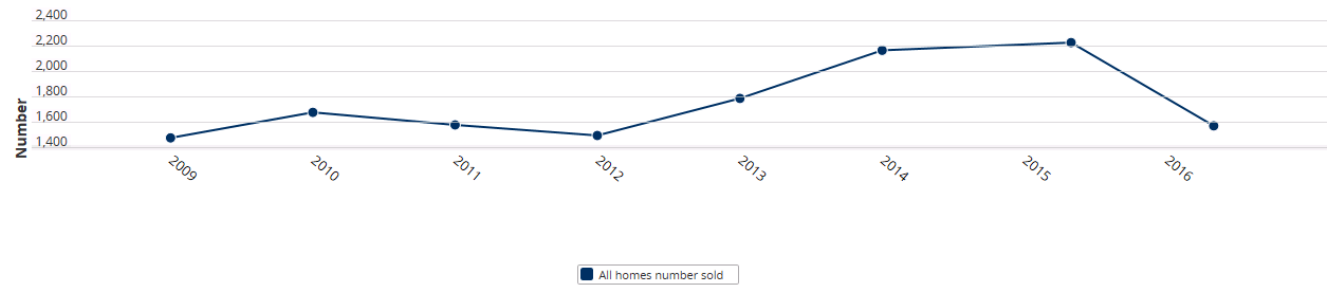
House prices and the number of homes sold

House Price



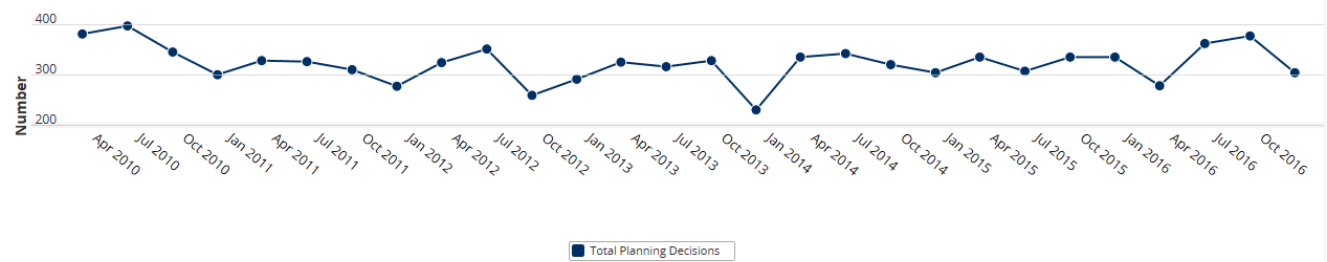
The average house price in Kent (KCC area) during 2016 was **£283,323**. The average price in Kent (KCC area) has increased for five consecutive years and is now **30%** higher than where they were in 2008. There were **19,117** property transactions in Kent during the year, **28%** lower than in the year before and reflecting the fall in sales seen in Ashford.

Number of Houses Sold

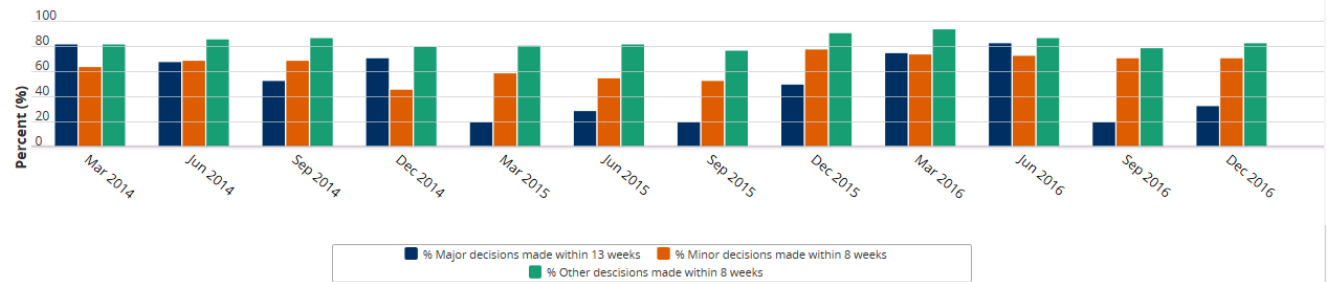


In February work commenced on the construction of 34 sheltered scheme apartments for local residents and 4 bungalows for private sale at Danemore, Tenterden, while the following month Clarion Housing Group completed a deal for Conningbrook Lakes site. The new development will comprise two, three, four and five bedroom houses, as well as a small number of apartments. This deal will also lead to developer payments being made to the Council for investment in the Country Park facilities.

Planning



The number of planning applications considered by the council has remained relatively steady, whilst the last year has seen significant improvement in the percent of decisions made within target.

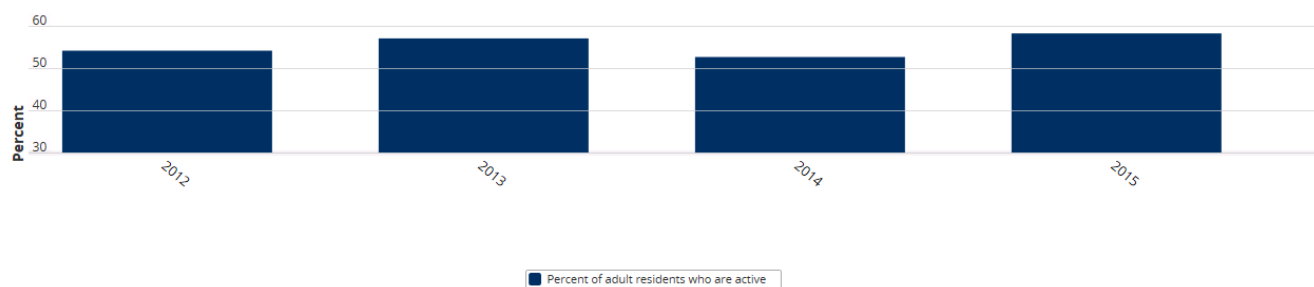


Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

Headline Report

Active and Creative Ashford

Healthy Lives and Active Living



Sport and Health

In February 'One You', the new health shop, opened in Park Mall, Ashford. The new health shop encourages people to quit smoking, lose weight and be more active.

The 'One Stop' initiative builds on the council's earlier initiative of a health and fitness activity campaign called Active Everyday, which encourage those aged over 60 to consider at least 10 minutes of exercise a day. The project provides a monthly calendar of suggested daily activities which range from light exercise, such as NHS health walks, short mat bowls and walking football, to more intense exercises like a bike ride or a Multi Activity Session.

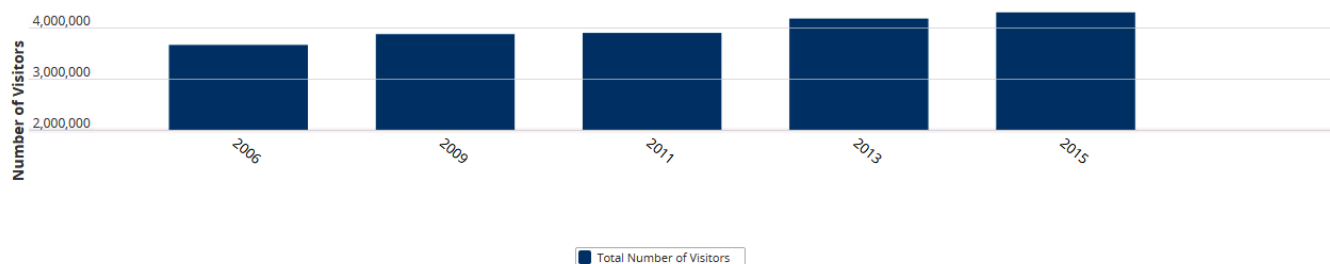
Supporting Culture and Creativity

In January construction works commenced on the new community centre at Repton Park, with the building programmed for opening in January 2018.

The Voluntary and Community Sector

At the end of 2016 volunteers from the Ashford Volunteer Centre were awarded a certificate by the Council in recognition for their outstanding contribution and work in the borough recently.

Tourism



Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

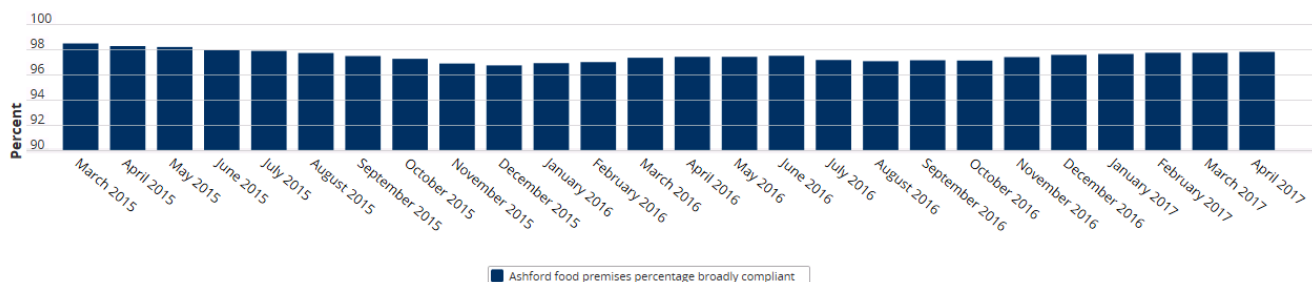
Headline Report

Attractive Ashford

Quality Across the Borough

Food Business Hygiene

There are almost 1,300 registered food businesses within the Borough. All are inspected on a regular basis according to their risk category.



This graph shows the percentage of businesses that are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards. Any business found to be non-compliant either receives a formal letter or a revisit. The percentage compliant upon inspected has remained within a half percent range during the last six months.

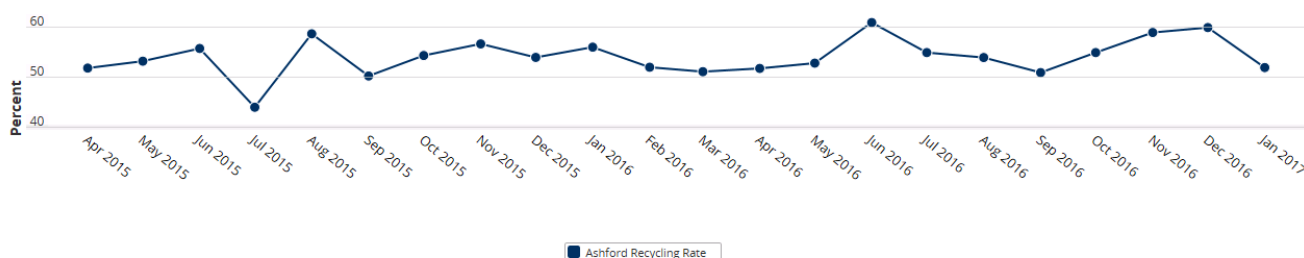
Guidance is provided to food businesses in the first instance and notices are service if conditions do not improve. Food businesses are also given a food hygiene rating which can view at <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/food-hygiene-rating-scheme>.

In September 2016 the Council approved a revised Food Safety Policy, which ensures a consistent approach to food safety inspections, enforcement and food sampling in line with current nationally accepted standards.

Other Measures to Improve Ashford

In February, Stagecoach launched a fleet of new Mercedes across Ashford, called 'Little and Often'. This service provides buses every five or six minutes along routes serving the hospital, town centre/rail station, Kennington and Park Farm.

Recycling



DEFRA's latest recycling league tables confirmed that Ashford remains the top recycler in the county. The borough's recycling rate of 53.1%, also makes it the 44th best recycling local authority in the country. To tackle a number of contamination issues which, if left unresolved might impact upon future recycling rates, in January Cabinet approved a range of communication activities designed to improve the recycling performance in the borough.