

**Agenda Item No:****Report To:** Cabinet**Date of Meeting:** 8 February 2018**Report Title:** Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3 2017/18**Report Author & Job Title:** Will Train, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer**Portfolio Holder** Cllr Neil Shorter  
**Portfolio Holder for:** 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 3 2017/18. 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.

**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 3 of 2017/18.**

**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

<b>Equalities Impact Assessment</b>	Not required because the report relates to a summary of past performance rather than any item requiring decision.
<b>Other Material Implications:</b>	N/A
<b>Exempt from Publication:</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	Will.train@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 300394)

## Report Title: Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3 2017/18

### Introduction

1. The report seeks to provide a headline overview of performance against the Council's Corporate Plan for Quarter 3 2017/18.
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**).

### Background

3. Each quarter the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny committees receive an update on how and how well the Council is achieving its objectives.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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 3 2017/18

### Activity

7. Quarter 3 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 –

#### October

- a. Aspire Landscape Management celebrated its first year as the Council's in-house grounds maintenance service.
- b. The Council won 'Engagement Team of the Year' and were shortlisted for two further awards at the prestigious national Engagement Excellence Awards.
- c. A significant milestone was reached within the Commercial Quarter development with the topping out of the first phase.
- d. The Council launched a joint operation with KCC to clamp illegally parked HGVs in the Borough.
- e. The Council's Heritage Strategy was approved by Cabinet.
- f. The Mayor's Achievement Awards were launched, recognising exceptional commitment to serving others and the local community.
- g. Aspire had a successful HSE audit at their Carlton Road depot.
- h. The Council and KCC committed to jointly funding a dedicated occupational therapist for the Ashford area. This move will seek to reduce waiting times for disabled facility grants.
- i. The Ashford Snowdogs sculpture trail was announced for the Borough, and will take place over 10 weeks from September to November 2018.
- j. Made in Ashford, a Park Mall based platform for local businesses to test their trade on a flexible basis, celebrated its second birthday.
- k. The Council signed a new partnership agreement with Ashford Leisure Trust (ALT) and both parties will work together to secure major investment into leisure facilities in the Borough.
- l. A Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), covering Ashford town centre and part of South Ashford (including the Designer Outlet and Victoria Park) was introduced with the aim of reducing anti-social behaviour.

#### November

- m. The Council's Digital Transformation Strategy was agreed by Cabinet, setting out how the Council will transform its service provision through developing a greater online service and offering customers a wider choice of ways to access Council services.
- n. Cabinet approved an action plan for supporting members of the Armed Forces Community to ensure that current and former service personnel and their families are not disadvantaged because of their service.
- o. A service was held to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Cambrai at Ashford's WWI Mark IV tank.
- p. The Council was shortlisted in two categories in the prestigious 2018 LGC Awards – Entrepreneurial Council of the Year and Council of the Year.

## December

- q. Ashford celebrated 175 years of rail service in the town with the unveiling of a specially named train 'Ashford – Proudly served by rail for 175 years'.
  - r. The Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, announced that development consent had been granted for the construction of Junction 10a of the M20.
  - s. Council adopted a discretionary rate relief scheme for the Borough.
  - t. Bethersden Parish Council submitted the Bethersden Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2030 to the Council for consultation.
  - u. Full Council approved the final submission version of the Local Plan to 2030, and it was submitted to the Secretary of State for public examination.
  - v. DEFRA confirmed that Ashford's recycling rate for 2016/17 was 55%, above the national target of 50% for the third consecutive year and 2% higher than 2015/16. The 2016/17 rate means that Ashford is the 35<sup>th</sup> best recycling local authority in the country, and has the highest rate in Kent.
  - w. The Council began the process of acquiring a property in Beaver Road to provide an additional eight units of short-stay accommodation to replicate the success of Christchurch House.
  - x. A Better Choice for Property Ltd, the Council's property company, purchased a number of properties off-plan at Victoria Crescent.
8. An online timeline of achievements and milestones in delivering the Corporate Plan is now available through the website, alongside the latest Annual Report - <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/transparency/our-performance/our-annual-report/>
9. As part of efforts to ensure that the Council operates transparently, work is currently underway to make the live Dashboard site available to the public. Once completed, a link to the Dashboard will be provided on the Council's website.

## Commentary on performance trends

10. Monthly town centre footfall throughout quarter 3 was lower than for the same period in 2016, with a sharp fall (-16.5%) in November. Footfall was up 1.7% across the wider south east and 0.8% nationally in the same period, with retail performance analysts Springboard noting that the increase was largely driven by leisure related trips, rather than spending<sup>1</sup>.
11. Average daily footfall has been lower than the previous year's performance in each month of 2017 with the exception of June, where the daily average was slightly above 2016 levels. Footfall has declined nationally over 2017, however Springboard note that this decline has been limited to day time hours, with footfall increasing post 5pm.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2017/12/november-sees-footfall-boost/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.spring-board.info/updates/article/2017-footfall-review>

12. Nationally, online shopping continues to grow, with a 27.2% increase in the number of online transactions in the four weeks leading up to Christmas 2017 compared to a 4.3% increase last year. Over the same period, footfall fell by 3.3% compared to a 1.6% increase in 2016.
13. Vacancy rates for both the high street and Ashford's shopping centres have fallen further over the last year, and are currently at 8%, the lowest level of vacancy since recording began in 2008 and below the national average of 11.1%.
14. Unemployment rates have remained steady over the past quarter at 1.6% of the Borough's population, broadly in line with the Kent average. Youth unemployment remains above the Kent average, but reduced through Quarter 3 to a lower level than the majority of 2017. Across the South East, unemployment levels were largely static over the last two quarters, with national unemployment falling to a 42 year low of 4.3% in November<sup>3</sup>. National average earnings also increased slightly in the last quarter, up 2.4% (equivalent to £11 per week) from last year.
15. The percentage of Major, Minor and Other planning decisions made within identified timescales all exceeded 80% at the start of Quarter 3, the highest levels achieved in the past 12 months.
16. The number of residents needing temporary accommodation has continued to increase over the last quarter, having moved above 50 (at time of recording) for the first time in the previous quarter.
17. The monthly recycling figures for the Borough showed an increase following lower recorded rates in the summer. Figures released by DEFRA summarising progress over the past year has seen the Borough increase its recycling share by 2% to 55%.

## **Conclusions**

18. Progress continues to be made against the aims of the Corporate Plan, with several performance goals at or near target. The information included within these reports provide merely a high-level snapshot of the information available constantly through the live Dashboard site, interactive Annual Report page and timeline of achievements.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

19. N/A

## **Other Options Considered**

20. N/A

## **Portfolio Holder's Views**

21. To be given at the meeting.

---

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics

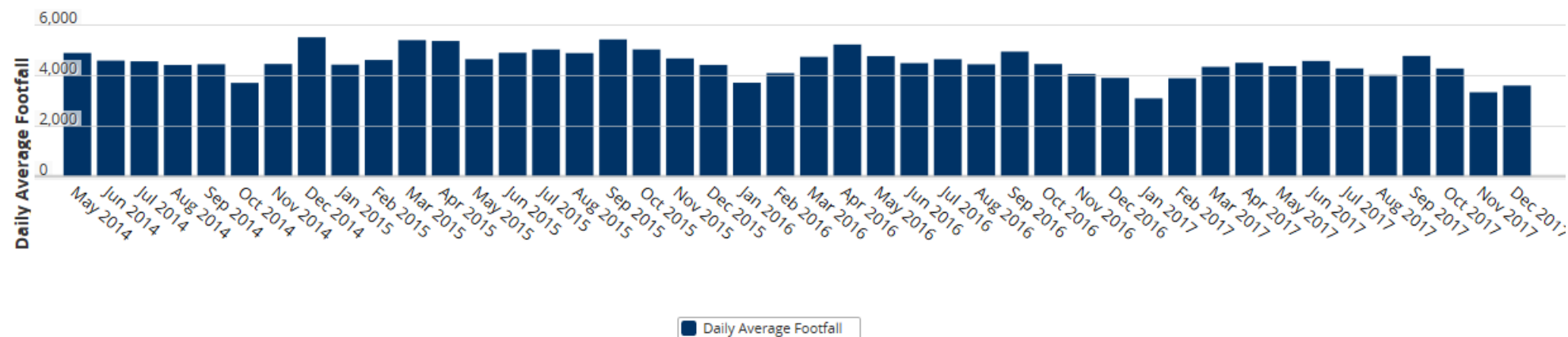
## Contact and Email

22. Will Train, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer  
[Will.train@ashford.gov.uk](mailto:Will.train@ashford.gov.uk)

# Appendix 1

## Enterprising Ashford

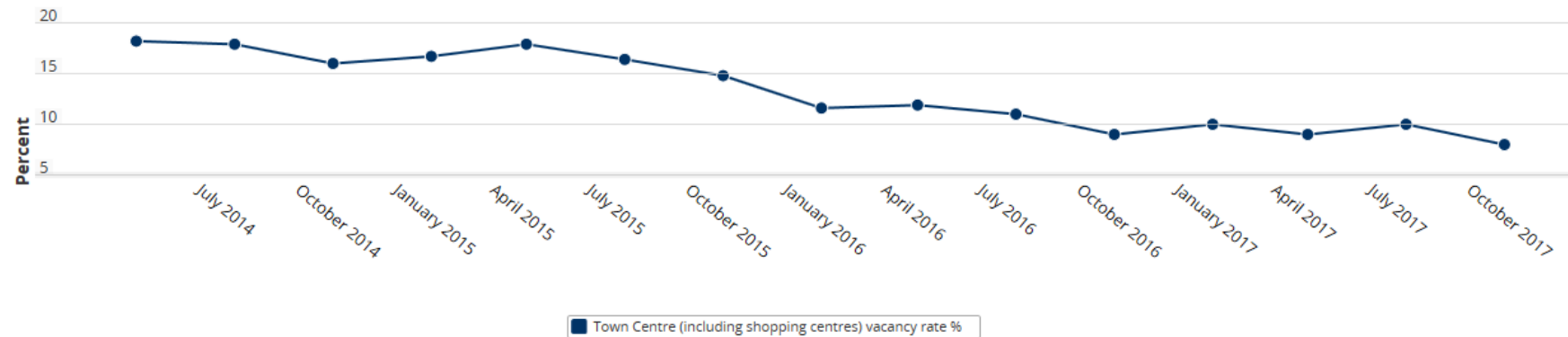
### Town Centre Footfall



Footfall was lower across quarter 3 than in the same period last year, with a sharp fall in November. This November decline is in contrast to the wider South East and the national picture, where footfall improved on 2016 levels. Across 2017, average daily footfall has followed broadly the same trend as 2016, however daily averages have been below 2016 levels in all months (bar June, where an increase on 2016 performance was seen).



## Ashford Town Centre Vacancy Rates



The vacancy rate for the town centre has fallen to 8%, the lowest since rates were first recorded in 2008 and below the current national average of 11.1%

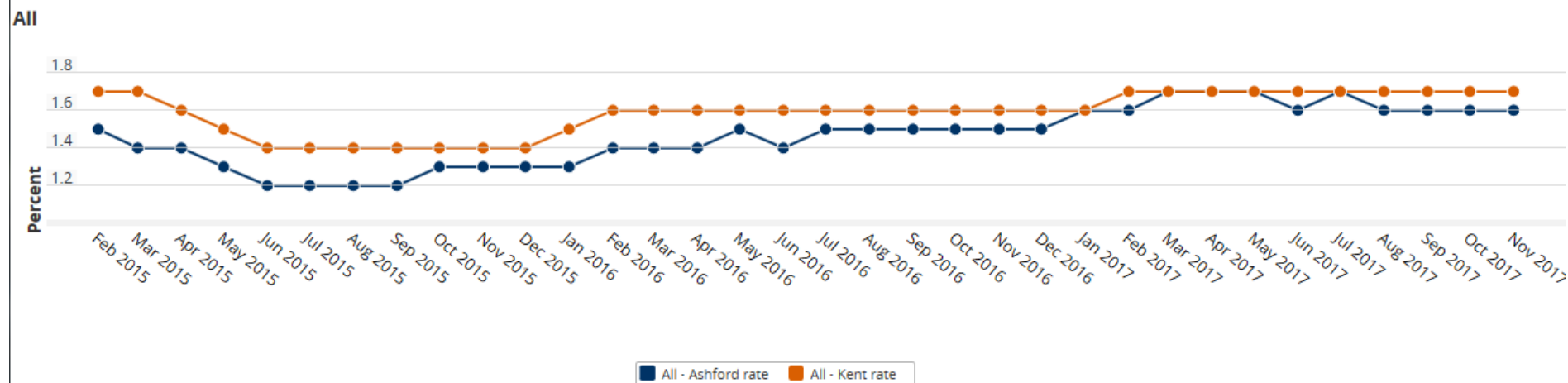
Vacancy rates have fallen across the town centre overall over the last year. Park Mall's historically higher rates have also begun to fall since the Council took over direct operations in 2015, with over half of the vacant units now full. The rejuvenation has been directly attributed with improving customer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

## Town Centre Development and Future Plans



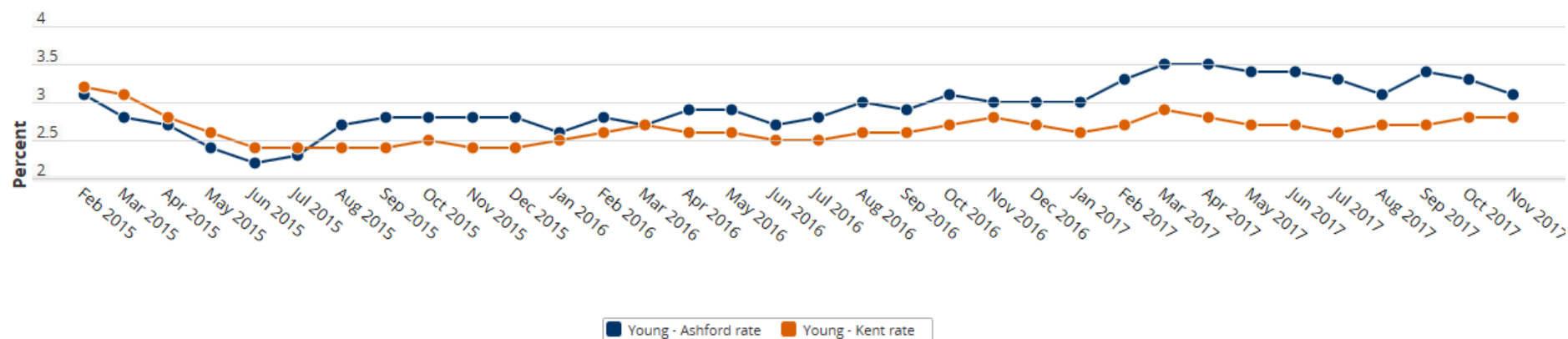
In December 2017 Kent and Medway was confirmed as one of ten areas to participate in a 100% business rates retention pilot scheme.

## Unemployment



Following a short period of increase, the total number claiming either Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed has remained steady or fallen slightly over the last few months, and now stands at just over **1,200**, constituting around **1.6%** of Ashford's working age population.

## Young People

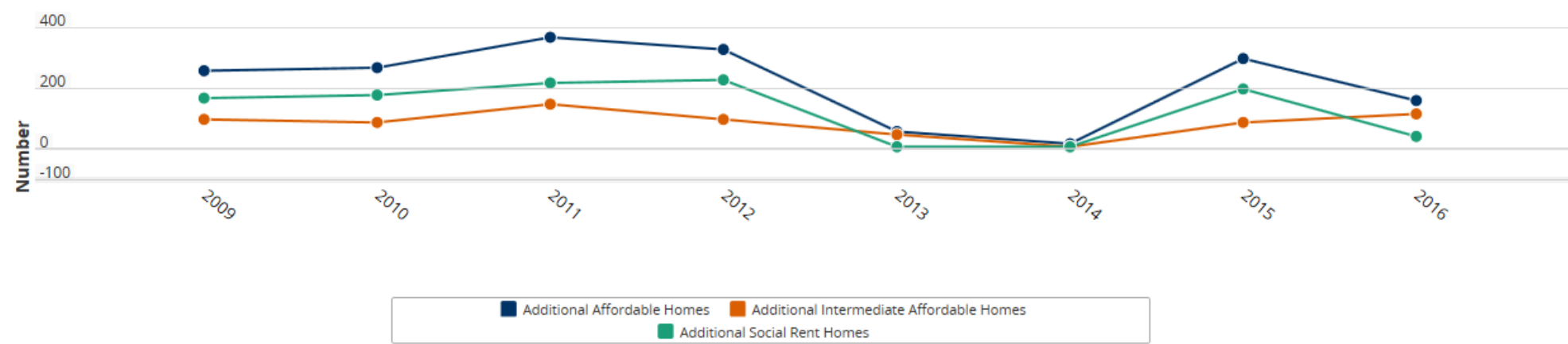


The number of young people (18-24) claiming unemployment benefit remained relatively steady through 2017, but is still slightly higher than the Kent average. A reduction in claimants over quarter 3 has brought claimant levels closer to 2016 performance.

# Living Ashford

## Affordable Housing

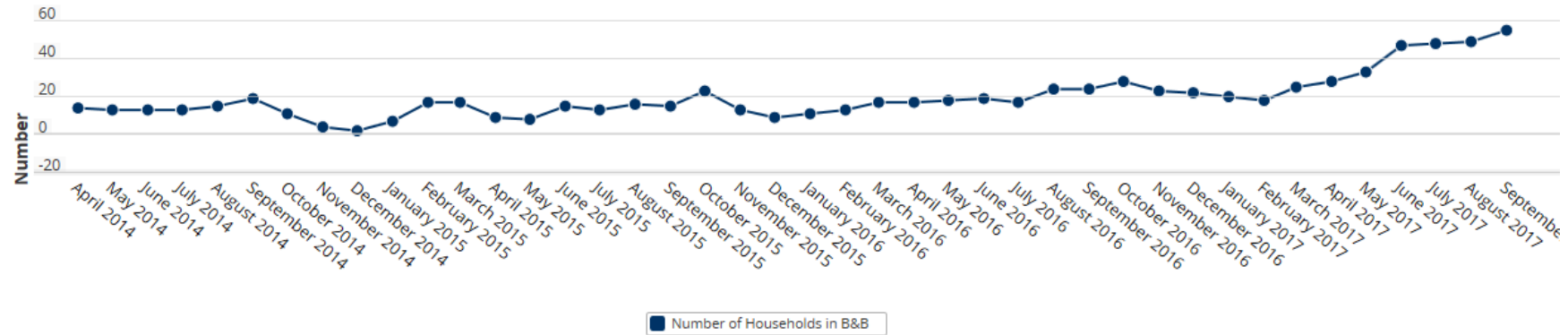
- The total additional Affordable Homes is made up of the following two main areas -
- Intermediate Affordable Homes, which includes intermediate rent and affordable home ownership; and
  - Social Rent Homes, which include affordable rent homes



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 2013/14.

In July Cabinet received an update on the HRA affordable housing delivery programme, and approved proposals for a new affordable housing programme over the next five years

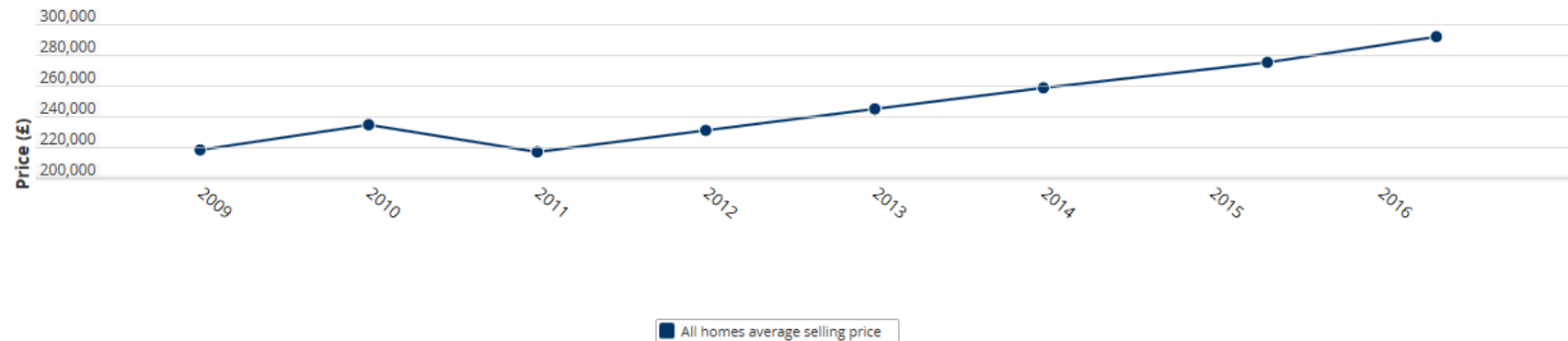
## Temporary Accommodation



By the end of the quarter the average number of households in temporary accommodation had increased to around **55**.

## House prices and the number of homes sold

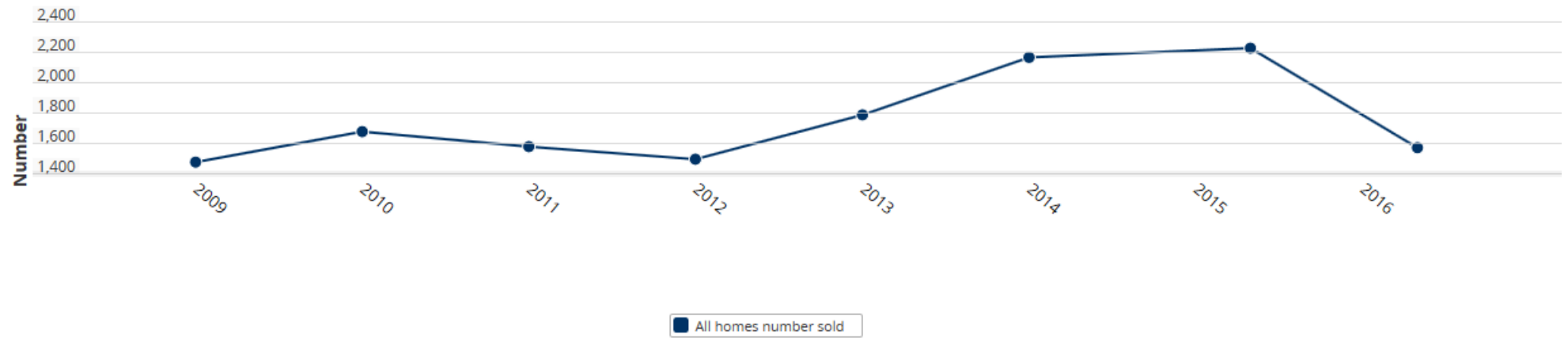
### House Price



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 in 2008.

There were **1,574** homes sold in the Ashford area during the year, **29%** lower than in the year before.

### Number of Houses Sold

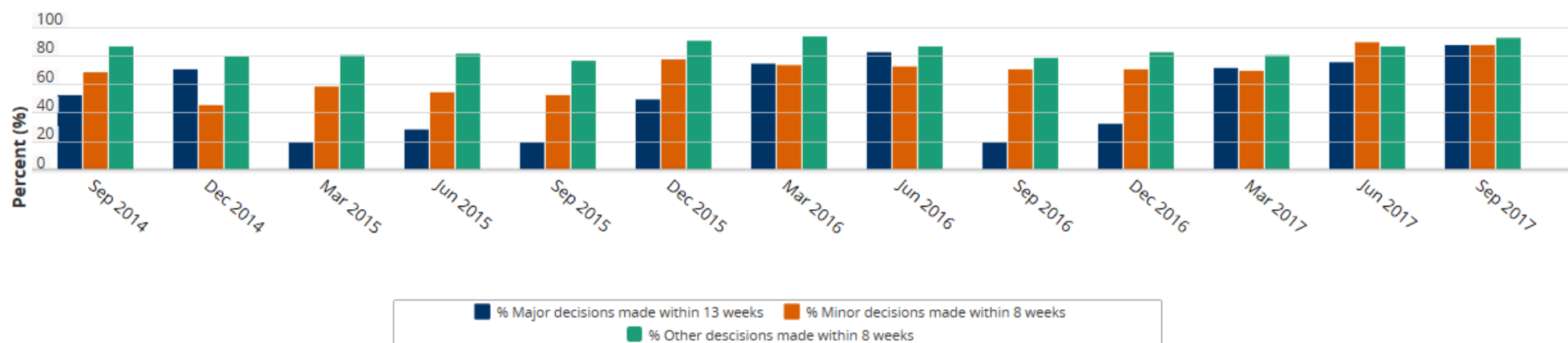


In July a new supported housing scheme for vulnerable young people opened at Belgic Court, The Limes – consisting of eight self-contained fully furnished one-bedroom flats and communal facilities

## Planning



The number of planning applications considered by the council has increased in 2017, largely mirroring the trend of 2016, whilst the last year has seen significant improvement in the percentage of decisions made within target.

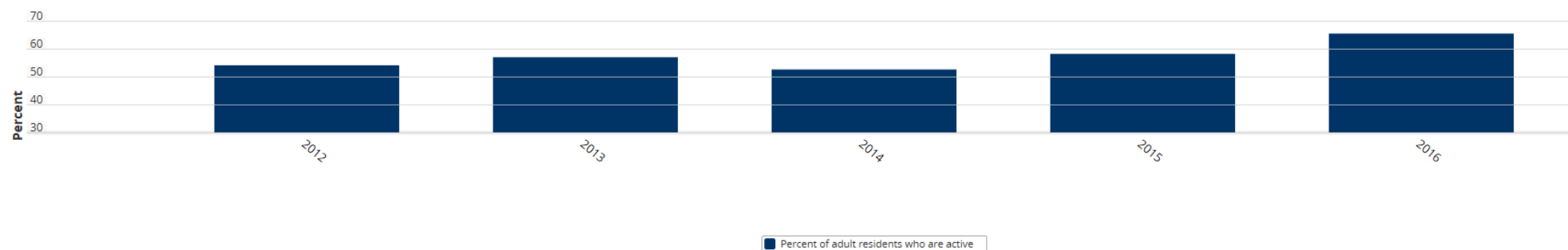


## Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

### Headline Report

### Active and Creative Ashford

#### Healthy Lives and Active Living



#### Sport and Health

In June the OneYou Health Shop has been given the go-ahead to continue for a further two years following a successful initial trial.

In July Cabinet approved plans to redevelop the existing play area near Victory Hall, Hamstreet

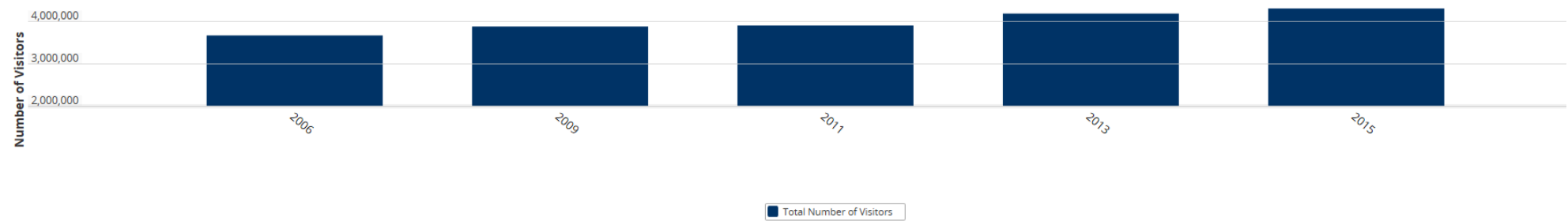
The Council has agreed to host the National Wellbeing Symposium at the Ashford International Hotel in February 2018

In September Conningbrook Lakes celebrated its 20th anniversary with a family fun day that attracted over 1,000 people to try canoeing, paddle boarding and other activities

# Supporting Culture and Creativity

## Tourism

In September 2016 a refreshed [www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk](http://www.visitashfordandtenterden.co.uk) website, which promotes the tourism offer of the borough, was launched during an event at Eastwell Manor.





## Ashford Borough Council Performance Dashboard

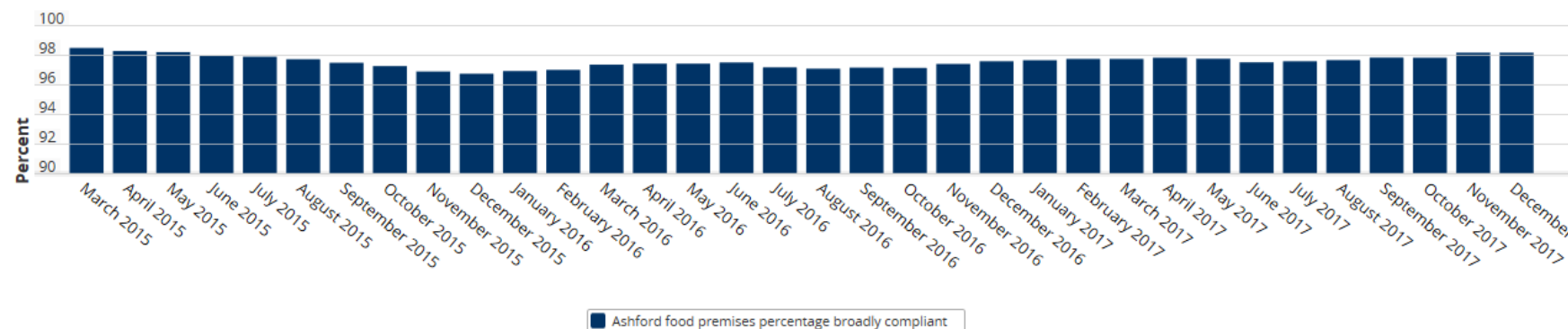
### Headline Report

### 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 served 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 December DEFRA released annual league tables for recycling, which recorded Ashford's recycling rate for 2017 at 55% - a 2% increase on last year. This result means that Ashford remains the best recycling authority in the county and is placed 35th nationally.

## Recycling

