

Bromsgrove District Council

Organisational Assessment

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of local public services

Bromsgrove District Council

Overall, Bromsgrove District Council performs adequately

Managing performance	2 out of 4
Use of resources	2 out of 4
Managing finances	2 out of 4
Governing the business	2 out of 4
Managing resources	2 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

Summary

Bromsgrove District Council performs adequately overall. Local people recognise the Council's priorities as issues that are important to them. Improving the town centre has been made more difficult because of the recession. Crime is reducing and the Council is working with its partners to help people through the recession. But the Council knows where it needs to improve, and works closely with other councils to help it improve. The costs of some services are high and the Council doesn't always know if its services are giving good value for money.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance.

The Council involves local people in the work it does and decisions it makes. But it knows it needs to improve the way it tells people what it has done because at the moment they don't feel they can influence decisions. The Council provides some good services, such as street cleaning and recycling, and most people are happy with these services. It uses its own resources (land or money) to help provide more housing that people can afford to rent or buy.

It is starting to understand how it can make a difference on climate change. The Council listens to vulnerable people to make sure that they have access to the services that they need. And it is working well to provide things for young people to do. People in Bromsgrove have a strong sense of belonging and feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together and treat each other with respect. Satisfaction with Bromsgrove as an area is about average.

People feel that Bromsgrove is a safer place to live in than it was. Crime is

reducing and the Council and the police work well together so that anti social behaviour is less of a problem. The Council is also working to support local people and businesses through the recession.

The Council has a good approach to engaging with black and ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups. There are now over 20 reporting centres throughout the district set up for reporting hate crimes, and the Council has been successful in recruiting local people to be trained. A special focus week for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-sexual people has been planned for February 2010. The Council encourages disabled people to have a stronger voice as demonstrated by the building of the new disabled toilet facility. Members of the Disabled User Group were on the community transport project team and will be involved in planning the new railway station. This shows that the Council listens to people though it recognises that it needs to improve the way it feedback to people about how it's responded to consultation.

The Council's performance in 2008/09 continues to show an overall marked improvement, although slightly fewer performance indicators met their (improvement) targets, 72 per cent compared to 79 per cent last year

The Council is open and honest about its achievements and the areas that it has to improve. It has strengthened the way it monitors its performance and is improving its ability to do more things better by working closely with other councils. In the Council plan for 2009-2012 the Council describes the outcomes they want to achieve from their work. This should help officers, members and the public see the benefit of actions more clearly. Councillors have good working relationships with staff. The way councillors and officers manage the Council's business has improved, but there is a concern about how to maximise involvement by all councillors at appropriate levels. Sickness levels are high and the Council is reviewing how it deals with staff who are ill.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for use of resources. This is because the Council's understanding of its costs is improving but it doesn't always know whether its services are delivering value for money. The council's spending is higher than many others yet satisfaction is average or lower than average. There is a good system in place for making savings from non-priority services to help improve the performance of priority services. Members of the public are involved in the budget decisions through a budget jury, an on-line budget consultation and by talking to young people and staff.

Each year an independent auditor looks in detail at the Council's accounts. During the audit for the year to 31st March 2009 there was a problem with the way that certain amounts were allocated in the accounts. None of the £4.5m cost of a programme to radically transform the Councils Technology and customer access was allocated to the income and expenditure account for the year. Instead it has all been charged into capital. This is what the Council planned to do, but there was insufficient evidence available during the audit to convince the auditor that this was the right way to account for at least £2.1m of this spending. The Council is seeking government approval to enable the costs to be allocated to Capital and in addition are requesting external advice as to the treatment of this project in the accounts. If approval is not given the Council would have to meet an element of these costs from revenue balances which would impact on the medium term financial plan. Due to the lack of evidence available to demonstrate these costs met the correct criteria the auditor could not say that the accounts presented a fair

overall picture of the Council's finances.

Different ways of providing services are being looked at. The Council shares a joint Chief Executive with Redditch Borough Council. Services will be shared between the two councils and combined savings made of about £1.2 million over five years. The Council is also working with the County Council and all Worcestershire district councils to share some services. The Council is developing its staff plans to make sure it has a skilled and flexible workforce for the future. It is good at managing changes and has an open and honest way of letting staff know what is happening.

About Bromsgrove District Council

Bromsgrove is a mostly rural district in north Worcestershire. It has a population of around 92,300 with a high number of older people, greater than regional and national averages. Many people in Bromsgrove are White British residents, with its ethnic minority population much lower than the national average.

Bromsgrove is an affluent district. Unemployment is below the national average but there have been more job losses as a result of the recession. The number of benefit claimants is lower than regional and national averages. Average house prices are higher in Bromsgrove than the regional and national average. People living in Bromsgrove enjoy better health than elsewhere in the region but children are not active enough.

The Council has 39 councillors. At the moment there are 26 Conservative councillors, 6 Labour councillors, 5 Independent councillors and 2 Residents Association councillors.

The Council's priorities are: town centre, housing, a sense of community, and clean streets and climate change.

Organisational assessment

A sense of community

People in Bromsgrove have a stronger sense of belonging to their community than most other Worcestershire districts. The number of people who are satisfied with where they live is about average compared to those in similar areas. Crime and disorder in Bromsgrove is reducing, and residents are less likely to think that anti social behaviour is a problem. Despite this, many people still fear being a victim of crime.

The Council is good at addressing what matters to local people and demonstrates good community leadership. For example, a mini festival to be held in Cofton Hackett this summer had raised local fears of an increase in anti social behaviour and the Council, together with the police, and festival organisers attended a public meeting to address and calm concerns. Local people were worried about planning approval being granted for the Foyer Scheme, a scheme for homeless people. However, officers have talked to

people about their concerns and what action could be taken. The Chief Executive has offered to meet with local residents.

The Council works with the County Council to meet the needs of young people. Working together means that funding is available from both the County's FLOSS (Funds Lots of Super Stuff) budget and the District Council's budget. As a result a wider age range of children in Bromsgrove are involved in deciding what their needs are, compared to the rest of the county. Children and young people have said they want improved parks, safer play areas, for example, at the Asda supermarket so that they don't have to go around the store with parents/carers.

Schools are also being made more eco friendly. People are being helped to become healthier. For example, sessions for fathers and sons are being held at allotments in Charford, and taster sessions for sports. As a result of the Council using its own budget, the work with children and young people is more likely continue when the FLOSS funds finish in 2011, and so children and young people will benefit in the longer term. Play schemes continue to be re-equipped, and children tell the manufacturers about the designs they would like. The newly refurbished Dolphin Leisure Centre is meeting the targets set for new joiners, and usage and income figures are improving. The number of adults doing sport is above the national average.

A lot of older people live in the district. The Council has not done enough to meet the needs of the growing number of older people, but this is changing. The Council is working with its partners to provide more and better accommodation for older people. Exercise sessions for older people have been set up working with NHS Worcestershire and with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust. More and smaller allotments have been made available, some with raised beds which are more suitable for older people. A community transport scheme will start in the autumn. A new high dependency toilet has opened. Councillors are reviewing how better to meet the needs of older people. The Council has achieved level three of the equality standard which means it is providing services that are fair for everyone and is one of only a few district councils to do so.

Town centre and housing

The Council wants to make a difference in the town centre, but regenerating this area is a difficult project because of the recession. Talks to move the 'blue light' emergency services to a new location to free up sites in the town centre are progressing. A new medical centre is set to go ahead. Plans to regenerate the Longbridge site are at a temporary standstill because of the recession.

Providing enough housing is a challenge for the area. A number of schemes are helping to provide housing that meets local needs. The number of affordable homes has increased (145 units in 2008/09) though there are still too few houses that people can afford to buy or rent. The Council uses its own resources to help provide affordable housing, offering land for housing development and funding for Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT). Affordable housing is being provided in rural areas such as Stoke Prior where lettings will be restricted to those who live or have previously lived in the parish. The housing needs of the more vulnerable people in the community

are being addressed. Funding has been obtained for the Foyer Scheme - a hostel for young people helping them in the move from prison to living on their own - with the Council using its own funding to help encourage others to provide finance.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has fallen which means that more families are settled. Bromsgrove District Housing Trust was given grant funding by the Council and BDHT now have a pool of flats to use for temporary accommodation. The Council with BDHT was until August 2009, the regional centre of excellence for youth homelessness, and together with the youth homelessness forum held an event recently to share their good practice. 'Step up', a private tenancy scheme for vulnerable people to access private rented accommodation, has been set up. The scheme gives a deposit of one months rent up front to people so they can have more choice of housing. The client pays back the deposit on more flexible terms. A mortgage rescue scheme has been put in place with the Citizens Advice Bureau and an information pack is available so that people can properly prioritise debts, and be aware of what benefits and advice are available.

With growing numbers of older people, a 'choices for older people' board is in place. This has looked at housing and support needs for older people. As a result the Council with the housing association, County Council and Primary Care Trust partners, are planning another extra care scheme at Perryfields. This is being designed to have bungalows with easily manageable gardens suitable for more independent older people as well as extra-care facilities for those who need more help.

Clean streets

The Council has been encouraging more people to recycle and compost their waste - and more people are. During 2009/10 the Council recycled 43 per cent of household waste. The overall amount of household waste collected per person is dropping though it is still relatively high, and the service remains quite expensive. Charges are now made for green waste collection and people are using this service.

Streets are cleaner. Local people say they are pleased with the standards of cleanliness of streets and open spaces. Operators are being trained to use more machinery so they can clear undergrowth and improve levels of cleanliness. Campaigns to improve waste collection and recycling continue and much is being done to keep local people informed. Fast food outlets are being encouraged to reduce the amount of litter they produce, and get these businesses to take more responsibility for the litter produced by encouraging people to put rubbish in bins.

Climate change

A new group has been formed to help contribute to climate change work. A climate change officer has been jointly recruited with Redditch Borough Council. The Council knows what its own carbon emissions are, and it has a travel plan to reduce mileage for staff. A survey was sent to more than 4000 households claiming benefits, to find the best way of helping those struggling with fuel bills. The Council aims to use the information along with results from

the countywide thermal flyover project (where all properties were thermally imaged so that heat loss could be seen) and make people aware of the various grants that are available.

A water course and flooding group has been set up to look at problems with flooding. A risk assessment has been carried out about where flooding is most likely to happen. The state of culverts and water courses has been reviewed. Properties affected by flooding in 2007 are issued with 'flood blox's' - self inflating flood blockers - in response to severe weather warnings. The flood blockers are easier to store and carry, and are more hygienic than sandbags. The Council is clear what it needs to do about flooding. It also recognises the need to make sure that land owners understand their responsibilities and plans to contact them about this.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>



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