

Harborough District Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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of local public services

Harborough District Council

Overall, Harborough 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

Harborough District Council performs adequately overall.

The Council is making reasonable progress in tackling things that local people see as important. Crime is reducing, for example, and people are being helped to take more exercise. The amount of waste being recycled is amongst the best in the country. Affordable homes for people on low incomes to rent or buy are being built, but overall there are not enough new houses to meet the district's needs, and disabled people wait too long for their homes to be adapted. The Council's original plans couldn't all be completed when it realised that it needed to make savings of £1.2 million in this year's budget. It may not have enough staff and money in future to do all it wants, but councillors and staff are working well together to make sure spending stays on track. The Council needs better plans to make sure it has the right staff with the right skills in the long term.

Harborough District Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. It knows that crime, affordable housing, and energy efficiency are important to local people and it is improving these things.

Crime is low and reducing due to good work with the police and local people. People are being helped to lead healthier lives. Close work with the NHS locally means that GPs refer people to leisure centres for exercise. The Council has responded quickly to the recession, providing additional help for people worried about debt.

The Council generally works well with other public services locally and across the county. They have agreed plans based on what local people say is

important and they are generally clear about who is responsible for doing what. The Council has meetings with local people and improves things that they are concerned about. Overall satisfaction with the Council is about average. The Council helps some vulnerable people but isn't sure that it is reaching all of the most needy. Disabled people wait too long for their homes to be adapted. The Council has started to look at improvements jointly with other councils but it is too early to see any results yet. It needs to find out who is in most need and make sure that help reaches them quickly.

While sufficient homes for people on low incomes to rent or buy are being provided, not enough homes are being built to meet overall demand. The Council is good at helping people at risk of becoming homeless. A lot of household waste is recycled and this is increasing.

The Council has coped well with having to manage with less money. This led to redundancies and some cuts in services, leaving it unable to complete all its plans. It improved some things like the new website but other changes were delayed. As the Council is still unlikely to have enough staff and money in the future for all its plans, it needs to move more quickly to find other ways of working including shared services with other organisations.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for use of resources.

It plans its spending well and has had to manage with £1.2 million less, which led to staff and service reductions. This has meant focusing on keeping services going and not completing as many improvements as it had planned. Councillors and staff work well together to make sure spending stays on track.

The Council looks at budgets and progress together so that it understands how changes in one affect the other. It makes sure that councillors and staff behave properly: in claiming expenses, for example.

The Council has reduced sickness absence, but it needs better plans to make sure it has the right staff with the right skills in the long term. It is working on these.

About Harborough District Council

Harborough is a rural district in south Leicestershire. The main towns are Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Broughton Astley. There are more than 90 villages - most of which have populations of less than 200. The population is around 82,000 with slightly more children and older people than the national average. The total population overall and the number of older people are expected to grow faster than average over the next 20 years. Most people in Harborough are from white ethnic backgrounds with fewer black and minority ethnic people than nationally or in the rest of Leicestershire. The area is relatively affluent with low unemployment, high skills levels and the highest house prices in Leicestershire.

Harborough District Council has 37 councillors. There are 26 Conservatives and 11 Liberal Democrats. This means that the Conservative party is in charge.

After taking the views of local people into account, the Council has agreed 12 priorities grouped into 3 themes. These are:

People - including reducing crime, improving health and wellbeing and supporting rural areas and business;

Place - including housing, environment and waste and recycling;

Resources - including improving efficiency and supporting voluntary organisations.

Organisational assessment

People Theme

Crime and anti-social behaviour in Harborough are low and have fallen further over the last year. Harborough people, according to an official survey, are not as worried about crime or anti-social behaviour as people in similar areas. The Council works with the police and residents to agree where and what to focus on. Using Smart Water - giving a 'fingerprint' to items in your home - in areas with higher burglaries has helped reduce break-ins. Operation Christmas Presence reduced drink related violence and anti-social behaviour in the towns.

The Council is helping people to lead healthier lives. Free swimming for the under 16s and over 60s has increased attendances significantly while a Tennis for Free programme at Welland Park led to a new community tennis club starting up. Joint work with the NHS means that GPs can refer people to the leisure centres for exercise such as the healthy walks scheme. Adults and children have taken part in lots of sport, exercise and dance activities such as the Step Out dance programmes and community sports days in Market Harborough and Lutterworth. Some schemes target particular needs such as childhood obesity and adults with learning disabilities.

Due to the rural nature of the district the Council holds local 'Have your Say' meetings with other public bodies such as police and health to listen to local concerns. This led to drainage ditches being cleared to prevent flooding and improved CCTV in Lutterworth. And special meetings have been held about wind farms and the proposals for an eco town in the district - Pennbury. Overall satisfaction with the Council is about average. People like living in the area and feel they belong.

The Council has done some good things to help vulnerable people. But it doesn't know enough about vulnerable people in the area or whether what it is doing helps those in most need. It jointly runs the new children's centre in Market Harborough with Homestart. Staff have increased school attendance of Traveller children and use of play facilities by the under fives. The Council has helped some disabled people and older people to stay in their own homes by providing grants for weather proofing, repairs, better heating and insulation. However, it adapted fewer homes so that disabled people could stay in their homes than in previous years and the wait for these changes is too long. The Council has started to look at improvements jointly with other

councils but it is too early to see any results yet. It needs to find out who is in most need and make sure that help reaches them quickly.

The recession is affecting Harborough but the Council has responded quickly. It held two conferences for businesses to discuss what to do. As a result the Council website now has links for businesses to get advice. It is paying its bills to local firms promptly and has updated town centre information for visitors about local shops to encourage people to spend more time and money locally. It has a commitment from government to part fund an innovation centre which will provide construction jobs and help new businesses get started.

Places Theme

Not enough housing is being built to meet need. An independent survey of housing need says that there is a greater need for affordable homes a year in Harborough than the Council's target or are being built. The survey says about 260 are needed and the Council has a target of 80 affordable homes a year. While some of the need is likely to be met by developments around Leicester, the Council target needs to be increased. The Council fell well short of its own target last year although it is on track this year with a development of 100 affordable homes being completed in May 2009. It is trying to encourage more renting in the private sector to meet some of the shortfall. But its recent record at persuading private landlords to bring empty properties back into use is worse than the national average. It is good at helping people when they are at risk of becoming homeless, dealing with one and a half times as many people as the previous year.

Since council housing has been transferred to Seven Locks Housing Association, good progress has been made in the promised improvements with many new bathrooms, kitchens and heating systems already installed. Prospects for completing the improvements on time are good.

Recycling of household waste has increased to 55 per cent and is amongst the best in the country. The Council is introducing food waste recycling across the district following successful trials in Lutterworth and Broughton Astley. It has increased the number of 'bring' sites to 65 and plans more - especially for plastics recycling. The Council has assessed its carbon footprint and set a target to reduce its own carbon emissions by a fifth over the next four years.

Resources Theme

The Council's original plans to become more efficient had to be changed when it realised that it needed to make savings of £1.2 million pounds in this year's budget. It quickly drew up new plans which included redundancies and some cuts in services. Staff worries about redundancies, having temporary staff in key posts and the work that was needed to deal with the eco town proposal meant that the Council wasn't able to complete everything else it set out to do. It focused well on what was important and managed to make some improvements at the same time. But it is unlikely to have enough staff or money to do everything it plans. It has launched a more user friendly website but plans for 24 hour payments by telephone and internet have been delayed.

Due to the recession, it increased grants to the Citizens Advice Bureau so that it could help more people with debt advice. Six thousand people were helped to cope with debts of £2.6 million and to claim benefits worth £200,000. It improved its planning service and has cleared a large backlog of planning complaints.

The Council achieves some efficiencies by sharing a few services with other councils, such as legal services, internal audit and buying goods. It has looked at sharing more services with other councils but agreements haven't yet been reached. Plans to make better use of council premises have been held up because of difficulties in reaching agreements with other parties. The Council is looking at plans for shared offices with Leicestershire County Council and Lutterworth Town Council. Like many public services, the Council may have to make more cutbacks in the future and this is likely to affect services to the public. The Council needs to move quickly on making savings through other ways of working such as sharing more services with others.

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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Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Telephone: 0844 798 1212
Fax: 0844 798 2945
Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946
www.audit-commission.gov.uk



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