

Leicestershire

Area Assessment (Summary version)

Dated 9 December 2009




oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Leicestershire at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Leicestershire. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from

 Green flag: Better value for money in road improvements

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

No red flags have been identified for Leicestershire

The local area

Leicestershire is a large county in the East Midlands and includes market towns, villages and more remote rural areas. The built up area of Leicester City stretches into the surrounding Leicestershire districts of Oadby and Wigston, Blaby, Charnwood and Harborough. The larger towns in the county are the university town of Loughborough and also Hinckley and Coalville.

The population of the area is 641,000, with Blaby and Charnwood being the most densely populated areas. There are more older people among the population than the national average and the number is expected to increase at a faster rate than nationally in the next twenty years. The majority of the county's population is from white ethnic backgrounds, but there are large black and minority ethnic communities in Charnwood and Oadby and Wigston.

Leicestershire is a relatively affluent area, and has become relatively more affluent in recent years, although there are pockets of deprivation. The economy in Leicestershire is based mainly around the service sector, in particular distribution and hospitality. There is low unemployment, above average earnings, and generally high skills levels. House prices are below the national average, though some districts show higher prices than the county

average. The health of Leicestershire people is generally good, although there are differences by place, gender and ethnicity.

Leicestershire's public services have agreed the following challenges that they need to tackle:

Improved life chances for vulnerable people and places

Stronger, more cohesive communities

A safe and attractive place to live and work

A more effective response to climate change

A prosperous, innovative and dynamic economy

A healthier Leicestershire

More effective and efficient service delivery

The next section tells you how Leicestershire's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

How is Leicestershire doing?

Improved life chances for vulnerable people and places

Public services are helping improve the lives of many vulnerable people in Leicestershire but there is more to do for some who are at greatest risk.

More disabled and older people and their carers are getting well co-ordinated support from the County Council and NHS services to live independently at home instead of going into hospital or care homes. A growing number are taking control of their own care arrangements. Disabled people are being helped into paid or voluntary work. But some learning-disabled adults are still living in institutions, and physically disabled people wait too long for adaptations to their homes.

People living in deprived areas with greater problems are being better supported. Partners have targeted 19 priority neighbourhoods providing extra facilities like children's centres.

Ofsted has found that almost all schools and services are good at protecting children from harm and helping them stay safe. Schools and colleges are helping children to do well and exam and test results for children at 11, 16 and 19 years of age have improved in the last four years. GCSE results are better than the national average and improving more quickly than average. But some groups of children do not do as well as they should.

School attendance by children in care has improved. Too many move home too often but recently this has improved. Plans are in place to improve further.

Councils don't always agree with each other or with residents over the number and location of Traveller sites although illegal sites are being dealt with better across the county.

Crime committed by ex-offenders is reducing, partly because those coming out of prison are helped to find settled accommodation as well as jobs or training. Re-offending is lower in Leicestershire than most areas and falling further. Young offenders are helped to get accommodation and training.

Not enough new homes that people can afford to rent or buy are being built in Leicestershire, partly due to the recession. Some developments have been completed early and some developments are wholly for rent by people on low incomes. More rented homes are available from private landlords.

Stronger, more cohesive communities

Over 80 per cent of residents across Leicestershire think that people of different backgrounds get on well together. This is above the national average but is likely to hide variations in the experience of different groups of residents. Almost 9 out of 10 people aged over 65 are satisfied with their homes and the areas they live in.

Partners help bring people with similar backgrounds and interests together so they can understand each others' cultures and lifestyles. Newcomers to Leicestershire, particularly migrant and refugee communities, are helped to settle in.

Local volunteering schemes are helping local communities and neighbourhoods get a stronger sense of identity and influence decisions that affect them.

Libraries are being re-developed across the county to become centres for local communities. Local people are influencing what facilities are provided.

Children and young people are encouraged to play a positive role in society. Almost all schools, nurseries and children's homes make sure children and young people are involved in decisions that affect them and contribute to their local communities. The county youth service provides a good quality and range of services, reaching more young people aged 13 to 19 than nationally and in similar areas. The number of young people who are committing offences has been reduced considerably. But more young people say that they drink too much alcohol or have taken drugs than in other areas.

A safe and attractive place to live and work

Leicestershire is a relatively safe and attractive place to live compared to the England average. The police and other partners are working well together to reduce crime. Anti-social behaviour and crime rates, particularly for youth crime, have been falling, although crime rates have not fallen as much as nationally.

Crime rates vary across the county. They are higher in more disadvantaged communities. Domestic abuse by repeat offenders in the county has risen in the last year. Public confidence in how successfully the police and other public organisations are dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour is lower than the national average. Since the tragic death of Fiona Pilkington and her daughter in 2007, partners have taken steps to improve services and communication between themselves and with the community about the effects of anti-social behaviour, particularly on vulnerable adults.

The county Youth Offending Service and partners such as district councils are successfully reducing the number of young people who have already committed offences and may re-offend.

The Fire and Rescue Service and its partners are working well together to prevent fires and the numbers of most types of fires have gone down.

The county, district and borough councils and their partners are working to increase residents' satisfaction with the quality of public and private buildings by improving design. They are also working to make the county more attractive by improving the network of green spaces between the city, towns and villages.

The quality and quantity of housing is important in making the county a safer and more attractive place to live. Housing services provided by some councils in Leicestershire have been poor, but are now starting to improve. At present, too many properties in Leicestershire do not meet some minimum standards.

The Partnership has taken steps to ease the effect of the recession and has helped families who may have been at risk of losing their homes. Fewer families are living in temporary accommodation, and the number of repeat homelessness cases are very low. Support is provided to vulnerable groups including those suffering domestic violence and some groups of young people. The Partnership is working on better allocation of empty council homes.

A more effective response to climate change

Leicestershire Together partners are working to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) produced in the area. They are also responding to climate change and improving air quality. Road congestion is reducing a little and councils are taking steps to make sure they and local businesses conserve energy. People are being helped to make their homes more energy efficient. Currently too many houses across the county are not energy efficient. Using public transport is being made easier in a number of ways.

Recycling rates are high in Leicestershire. Councils are doing more to help people to reduce the amount of waste that is produced and goes to landfill.

Councils are developing more green areas and woodlands. The National Forest has meant more of the county is now wooded, helping air quality and increasing access to green space. There are plans to develop Charnwood Forest into a regional park.

A prosperous, innovative and dynamic economy

The recession is beginning to bite in Leicestershire. Although the Leicestershire economy is in a good condition, unemployment is rising. But a speedy response to the recession has helped people and businesses. Debt and money advice has increased. Grants are helping start up new businesses and keep existing ones going. Regeneration of some towns has started.

Skills levels are higher than the national average except at degree level. School results are above average at all ages and improving quicker than elsewhere although some groups are being left behind at GCSE level. A variety of training for adults is provided in different places, some with childcare on-site. Some is geared towards creative industries and some for learning-disabled people.

A joint economic development plan with Leicester City has been agreed. This is a result of a multi-area agreement between the city and county areas and the government, one of the first in the country. It is intended to help with unemployment and skills training but is too early to see if it is working. The city and county partners are also working closely on transport and housing.

A healthier Leicestershire

People's health in Leicestershire is generally better and improving faster than the averages for England, and people tend to live longer. But there are some areas in the county where people tend not to live as long as in others. The percentage of residents who report their health in general to be good or very good is higher than the national average. Overall Leicestershire also has better results on average than England for a range of issues that affect health, for example, drug misuse and children in poverty. Fewer people die from smoking related illnesses than the average for England and rates of smoking generally are also less. But smoking rates are rising and too many pregnant mothers smoke in all seven districts in Leicestershire.

Drug and alcohol use is less of a problem than elsewhere. But more young people say that they drink too much alcohol or have taken drugs than in other areas.

There are fewer teenage pregnancies than the average for England but these numbers are also rising and the gap with the rest of the country is reducing. The NHS and other services need to make sure they understand why trends in some areas have started to rise and take action to bring them down again.

The NHS provides a range of healthcare services, including mental and community hospitals to bring care closer to home. Partners are also helping people adopt healthier lifestyles, for example with weight reduction and exercise referral schemes. Overall, people are more active, but some districts do not do as well as others. Fewer primary school children are obese than the average for England. But too few adults eat healthily and too many are

overweight.

More people over 65 are in good health than the national average and there are some good quality services. Only just over three in ten people think older people get what they need to help them live independently, although this is above the national average. Partners need to make sure they target how NHS and council money is spent so that areas with poorer health or less healthy lifestyles are improved to the standard of the best in the county.

More effective and efficient service delivery

The Leicestershire Partnership is one of the few across the country to have set itself a target of saving over nine per cent of their budgets over three years by working more efficiently. They have achieved three per cent in the first year but making savings is getting increasingly difficult.

Partners are jointly buying some of the services and things they need saving taxpayers' money. The County Council took a lead with other county and city councils in the East Midlands to get an innovative contract for highways and road improvement work that will save money. This multi-council contract is the first of its type in the country. But public services in Leicestershire are not making as many savings as they could if they delivered more of their services jointly.

Effective services are those that are easy to access. People living in Leicestershire generally have good access to public services and there are many ways of accessing them. Residents are satisfied with how easy it is to contact their GPs. But getting good public transport and housing that is affordable is more difficult for people living in rural areas of the county.

Schemes to provide more housing in rural areas that people can afford are being developed. Grants for taxi vouchers, and dial-a-ride schemes run by voluntary organisations have helped increase people's access to services in rural areas.

The Leicestershire Rural Partnership is doing a good job helping rural areas to thrive. Help and advice is given to businesses to support the rural economy. But the market towns are feeling the effects of the recession with an increase in vacant shops.

Contacting and obtaining public services in Leicestershire is not as straightforward and streamlined as it could be. Much better co-ordination is needed which could also help save money. Partners have very recently started work to make improvements.

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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