

Wiltshire Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



for an independent overview
of local public services

Wiltshire Council

Managing performance	N/A
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

The Council has managed the transition from five councils to one well. Leadership during the process has been strong. The Council is keen to change the way that it works so that local people are more involved in decisions and delivering services. It has set up 18 area boards covering the whole of Wiltshire to help make this happen. People in Wiltshire are happy with their ability to influence decisions and the way that public services treat them.

The Council is working well to support local people and businesses through the recession. Most children make a good start in life, enjoy good health and achieve well in education and training. The gap between the majority and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable is closing in some areas, but the picture is inconsistent for different groups.

The Council is transforming its adult care services to respond to increasing demand and provide better services. The Council's waste management arrangements are strong. Wiltshire Council works well with partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime in the county. This is reflected in people feeling that anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse are not big concerns in their local area.

Wiltshire is very well kept. But the Council has only started work on dealing with climate change fairly recently. Planning performance in some parts of the county has been poor but are starting to improve.

More needs to be done to tackle inequality in Wiltshire. The Council and other public services have a good understanding of where inequality occurs. They are working together to meet the needs of people such as gypsies and travellers who do not find it as easy to get the services they need.

The Council's housing plans are currently incomplete. It has inherited a range of plans and information from the previous four district councils that it is

working to consolidate into a single county-wide plan by 2010. The Council's approach to private sector housing and management of its own houses is a concern.

About Wiltshire Council

Wiltshire Council is a new council from 1 April 2009. It now delivers services such as education and social care that used to be provided by the former Wiltshire County Council as well as all the services previously provided by Kennet, North Wiltshire, Salisbury and West Wiltshire District Councils.

Local elections for the new council took place in June 2009. The council has been assessed in the same way as other councils, but we have not scored our overall assessment. We have scored our assessment of how well resources have been used, based on the last financial year of the former County Council, which controlled most of the council spending for the area.

Organisational assessment

Overall effectiveness

Leadership throughout the recent organisational changes has been strong. The Council has managed the transition well from five councils to one. People from the Council and from other organisations believe that continuity of leadership throughout the process has been invaluable. The Council had a deliberate plan of making sure that it got the basics right first - such as one telephone number, a new website and continued delivery of services from areas known as hubs across Wiltshire. Now it is in the process of more radical changes, where needed, to improve the quality and experience of services to people across Wiltshire. Its high profile campaign to tell local people about the changes was effective and the savings it said it would make as a result of changing to one council look set to be exceeded for the first year.

A recent national survey showed that almost 86 per cent of people are satisfied with Wiltshire as a place to live which is above average satisfaction levels nationally and in the South West.

Setting priorities that create stronger more resilient communities

The Council is clear that it wants to change the relationship with the public so that local people are more involved in decisions and delivering services. And the Council wants to further improve joint working with other public services, recognising that local people are not interested in which organisations deliver services, just in how good the services are.

The Council has taken a practical approach to producing a corporate plan for its first year. It has produced a one year plan that has three goals with associated actions for the first year. The plan is open and honest and written in plain English. It is clear about what things are important to local people and

what things need improving. What is less clear is the relative priority of different services, and specifically, which services are lower priorities to help inform budget decisions.

The Council has an effective process in place to produce a new corporate plan now that elections are over. The new plan will use evidence such as recent research into health and associated issues, local people's views, and the comprehensive community area profiles that the Council has produced for local communities. The Council has also carried out a rural assessment and worked with black and minority ethnic communities to better understand their needs to help inform the plan. And area boards will input into the process too. The intention is for the new corporate plan to be focussed on people and places. A recently produced report about the impact of proposed military changes in Wiltshire will also provide useful information to allow managers in the Council to plan accordingly.

Creating stronger more resilient communities

Supporting business through the recession

Wiltshire Council is making progress on the actions set out in a recent consultant's report about combating the recession in Wiltshire. Activity includes working with local businesses to understand what support they need; providing rate relief to businesses and working with JobCentre Plus to respond to local redundancies.

The Council provides strong leadership that is recognised by partners in helping to maintain a strong economy in Wiltshire. For example the Council and the South West Regional Development Agency have jointly funded land at Ludgershall to provide a new business park and the first phase of its development.

The Council is building capacity to support economic development in Wiltshire. It has funded managers to run three new economic partnerships. These partnerships are independent and include representatives of the business community, local authority and other statutory and support agencies. Their role is to bridge the gap between the world of private enterprise and local government.

Supporting people through the recession

The Council is taking steps to reduce the impact of the recession on local people. For example, it is helping young people by providing an apprenticeship scheme and working with other Wiltshire employers on a bid for government funds to provide 450 work experience places for 18 - 24 year olds. And each member of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team will be supporting a young person not currently in education, training or employment.

The Council has speeded up its processing of housing benefits claims in Wiltshire but differences exist depending on which part of the County you live in. The service is delivered through four hubs mirroring the service delivery prior to the unitary council. The average number of days to process new claims varies between 5 and 11 days across Wiltshire.

Helping children to reach their full potential

Children's services in Wiltshire Council perform well. The overall effectiveness of the large majority of inspected settings and services is good or better. A high proportion of nursery and childcare settings are good or better. Although childminding provision is satisfactory overall, it is not as good as the average found in similar areas. A large majority of the county's primary, secondary and special schools are good or better. The overall effectiveness of secondary schools and school sixth forms compares well with the average in similar areas and nationally. However a high proportion of primary schools are no better than satisfactory and a small number is inadequate. The pupil referral unit and the two further education colleges are satisfactory. The children's home and the fostering service are good. A review in November 2008 judged arrangements for keeping children safe and provision for looked after children as adequate. A serious case review was judged inadequate in January 2009. It raised concerns about the failure to address some key issues together with an insufficiently clear action plan and variability in the quality of independent management reviews, including that provided by the Council.

Performance against the very large majority of national indicators is above or in line with similar areas and the national figures. Most children make a good start in life, enjoy good health and achieve well in education and training. The gap between the majority and those whose circumstance make them vulnerable is closing in some areas, but the picture is inconsistent for different groups. For example, at age 16, young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from poorer families achieve well below average and the gap is widening. Actions to address this (such as allocating a head teacher who checks the progress of children in care) are starting to have an effect but it is still too early to be certain of the full impact of the Council's plans.

The Council makes a good contribution to promoting healthy life-styles for children and young people. A high proportion of children and young people take part in physical exercise at school and an average percentage of children are happy with parks and play areas. A lower than average percentage of children aged 10 to 15, who took part in a survey, reported using drugs or alcohol.

The Council's traveller education service is improving the educational experience for gypsy and traveller children and building understanding of their culture with the wider school population. Traveller culture has been incorporated into the school curriculum with positive feedback from pupils and staff. Help is being provided for pre-school travellers with the transition to school and this has resulted in more children entering education. Travelling children have been assigned a host school that maintains contact with them over the travelling season and provides laptops to some children. This has the added benefit of aiding the learning of the wider family group and also helping with reintegration back into school at the end of the travelling season.

Supporting older residents and disabled people to live more independently

Adult social care services in the Council perform well. The Council is transforming its adult care services to respond to increasing demand and provide better services. It knows it needs to redesign services to make sure it can meet increased demand as well as allow people to "have a life rather

than a service". Social care for older and vulnerable people has improved since last year but there is more to do. The Council consults users and their carers well and uses what they tell them to help design services. Partners have worked together well to make sure that people are not admitted to hospital unless this is necessary and are discharged quickly when they are. Other improvements include more support for people who care for others and improvements to help people to live independently at home. But some people have to wait longer than they should to get adaptations to their homes where they need them. And there is still work to do to make sure that the most vulnerable people are safe.

The Council, with partners, is working to consider the needs of the growing older population in Wiltshire. It has developed a plan that sets out the future need for older people's housing. It is supporting activities to improve the well-being of older people including opening of a dementia cafe to support sufferers of dementia and their carers and campaigns to prevent falls. A recent national survey showed that one in three people think that older people get the help and support they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want. This is better than the national average but just below the average for the South West

Delivering high quality, low cost, customer focused services

The Council has a strong track record in managing its finances well. It has good arrangements in place for financial planning and monitoring and has a firm understanding of how costs link to performance. The Council has a strong focus on identifying and delivering efficiency savings. Following the transition from five councils to one, it is carrying out a programme of reviews to better understand costs and where improvements can be made to deliver better services and save money. And projections are that the move from five councils to one will result in £8.5 million savings - nearly £2 million more than initially forecast.

Housing people

The Council's housing plans are incomplete. Its information about housing needs across the county is variable and it is taking action to improve its understanding. But this means that at the moment it does not have a detailed plan in place about what the Council is going to do to meet current and future housing challenges in Wiltshire. The amount of staff and funding to deliver improvements across strategic housing services has been inconsistent in the four previous district councils. The creation of a new council offers the potential to address these issues but developing a comprehensive framework of housing plans and updating existing policies and procedures is likely to be challenging. The Council expects to adopt a new housing strategy in 2010.

The previous four district councils were not proactive in managing the quality of private sector housing. Performance in bringing empty homes back into use has been weak, the approach to improving houses in multiple occupation has been a concern and the energy efficiency level of homes in the county is low. Reorganisation of housing services in the new Council is strengthening the approach, but it is too early to see if this is improving housing conditions.

The Council's management of its own houses is of concern. It manages about 5300 houses. It takes a long time to re-let empty homes and the number of routine repairs completed on time is low. And high levels of repairs done as emergencies rather than during a planned programme of work mean that the Council is not achieving good value for money. But social housing stock is in good condition with a low number failing to meet a national standard for homes in the social housing sector.

The Council has improved the housing experience for homeless people in the county by significantly reducing its use of temporary housing and has stopped using bed and breakfast accommodation too. It provides good housing support for vulnerable young people with almost all young offenders and all care leavers in suitable accommodation. Social housing tenants have more choice of rented housing across the county, rather than being restricted to some parts of Wiltshire as in the past. The Council has exceeded its targets for the delivery of new affordable houses and is working well with the Ministry of Defence on longer term planning for housing and sustainable communities.

Keeping Wiltshire safe

Wiltshire Council works well with partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime in the County. This is reflected in people's perceptions about antisocial behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse. A recent national survey showed that people in Wiltshire are generally less worried about these things than people nationally, in the rest of the South West or in similar council areas. And they are happy with the way that the police and the Council seek their views about and deal with these issues. But a low number of people understand what local arrangements are for dealing with a major emergency. The recent survey showed that only one in seven people in Wiltshire felt either well informed or very well informed about local arrangements. This is below both the national and South West averages and the average for similar councils. Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are good in almost all education and care services and settings, however a higher than average number of children, who took part in a recent survey, have experienced bullying.

Getting from A to B and maintaining and improving streets

The number of main roads needing repairs has increased slightly this year. In previous years but the condition of roads had improved but an increase in the costs of road repairs, and poor weather conditions causing faster than usual surface deterioration have resulted in more roads needing repair this year.

Wiltshire Council recognises that some people cannot get the services they need if they do not have their own transport and it is taking some actions to address. Some good initiatives include wheels to work - a scheme offering subsidised loan of mopeds to young people for work and work-based training and the Connect 2 Wiltshire community transport service providing transport for people in rural areas who do not have access to public transport.

Reduce, reuse, recycle

The Council's waste management arrangements are strong. It exceeded its targets for reducing the amount of rubbish collected and for recycling and, as a result, reduced the amount of rubbish it sent to landfill. In 2008/09 local people put out less waste for rubbish collection than the previous year (an average of 664kg compared to 727 kg). More rubbish was also recycled - up to 41 per cent in 2008/09 compared to 37 per cent in 2007/08). And the Council is looking at different ways to get rid of rubbish. It has started delivering waste to an incinerator and a facility in Westbury has planning permission to convert waste into fuel. The Council has plans in place to deal with the rubbish that people in Wiltshire produce until 2013. It is working with Swindon Borough Council to look at ways to jointly deal with waste after 2013.

Planning and environment

Since becoming one council the performance of planning services across Wiltshire has improved and in the first quarter of 2009/10 the Council exceeded its targets for the amount of time it takes to deal with all types of planning application. In 2008/09, the average time for dealing with planning applications in the west of the county was among the worst in the country, although performance in the rest of Wiltshire was better. The Council has concentrated its efforts in this area of the county to maintain improvement. Changes to the planning service are progressing well. Most staff are now in place in the new structure following the merger of the five councils in Wiltshire. The Service is looking at how it can improve customer service and make sure the service is the same across Wiltshire.

Wiltshire is generally very well kept. The incidence of litter, graffiti and fly-posting are all low compared to national benchmarks and performance in 2009/10 has improved from the previous year.

Climate change

The Council has not had an effective approach to dealing with climate change and reducing its environmental impacts until recently. This has changed now and the Council is working to ensure it has the staff and funding to meet its carbon reduction commitments. It has just recruited an officer to take this work forward and is in the process of setting up a climate change board to oversee a programme of actions as well as a producing a plan to deal with the effects of climate change. The Energy Savings Trust is providing support to the Council to identify actions it needs to take to reduce carbon emissions. The Council has taken some steps to reduce its emissions including installing energy meters in some buildings, solar panels in some schools and improving insulation in leisure centres. And the Council is taking part in a national programme to prepare it for targets to reduce its carbon emissions that will start in April 2010.

Local, open, honest decision making

Wiltshire Council has a genuine desire to involve local people in open and

honest decision making and has allocated resources to make this happen. It has set up 18 area boards covering the whole of Wiltshire. The area boards are a council initiative but the Council and other public service providers are keen to make sure these boards should have a much wider remit than just the services provided by the Council – for example to include services provided by police, fire & rescue and the health service. One of the Council's senior managers as well as an area manager are allocated to each area board to make sure senior officer support as well as councillor support for the boards. A range of services are using the area boards to consult with local people – for example the planning service is advising developers to consult area boards on big or controversial schemes to help inform design. And the team working to produce the medium term land use plans for the County will be working with area boards to inform what happens where in Wiltshire.

People in Wiltshire are happy with their ability to influence decisions and the way that public service providers treat them. The percentage of people in Wiltshire who feel that they can influence decisions locally is high at almost 32 per cent. This is above the national and South West Averages and above the average compared with similar councils. And more than three quarters of people in Wiltshire feel that they have been treated with respect and consideration by their local public services in the last year. This is also above the national and South West averages.

Tackling inequality and improving outcomes for people in vulnerable circumstances

In Wiltshire most people feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together and that people feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood. This is better than the average nationally and in the South West.

The Council recognises that it has work to do to meet the requirements of the new equality framework for local government. It has produced an open and honest self assessment that provides it with the information it needs to develop an action plan for making sure it does not discriminate against people and that everyone is able to get the services they need. The Council has made some changes to its services after reviewing them to see whether any particular groups were not getting the right level of service. For example the youth development service recognised it was not working effectively with gay and lesbian young people. So now a specific worker is allocated who supports the service to offer support and advice to young people.

The area boards are working hard to ensure they involve local people including those who would not typically get involved. During the trial of area boards, six areas worked with the Wiltshire Race Equality Council to come up with a set of actions to make sure area boards in the future make meetings accessible and involve minority communities. Examples of actions already taken or planned include setting up a register of suitable area board venues; considering crèche facilities for larger meetings; and working with those who are in touch with minority communities. The area boards' website provides people with the opportunity to report problems in their area and to track progress with local issues at area board level. And the Salisbury area board piloted participatory budgeting for disabled young people between the age of

11 and 24 where they had a chance to decide how £50,000 community budget should be spent.

The Council and other public services understand the needs of gypsies and travellers. Research carried out in 2008/09 shows that gypsies and travellers have generally worse health than other members of the community. It found that organisations do not routinely make information available in pictorial form although many gypsies and travellers do not read or write. Little help and advice is available to support gypsies and travellers to complete housing benefit and other forms for example. The Council works with other local services such as the Primary Care Trust, police and voluntary organisations to make sure the needs of gypsies and travellers are met. For example, support is given to gypsies and travellers who are carers. Some attitude problems towards gypsies and travellers persist that will need to be overcome if they are to receive equal access to services.

Leadership, capacity and capability to deliver future improvements

The Council continues to develop strong leadership to support people through the continuing change resulting from the transition from five councils to one in Wiltshire. It is developing its ability to deliver future improvements. For example, it is putting in place a training programme for managers based on how it wants the new council to develop. And councillors are allocated to support cabinet members to provide additional councillor capacity.

Pay and condition harmonisation could impact on staff morale. The Council needs to do a lot of work to make sure that staff's pay and conditions are fair. This is because people have transferred into the new council from different local government organisations in Wiltshire on a variety of different terms and conditions. Senior officers and councillors in the Council know this needs to be handled carefully to avoid a negative impact on staff morale that could affect services.

Performance management arrangements are developing in this transition year. Managers are taking a sensible approach focussing on the first year corporate plan and the targets in the local agreement for Wiltshire. The Council is working on developing a thorough approach to monitoring and managing how services perform using a new computer system and arrangements to manage performance with partnerships are strong. But two highly public data security incidents occurred in the year when internal data security procedures were not adhered to.

The transition has created some capacity issues for some teams, such as housing, where it has taken a while to get the whole team in place. This is a concern because a lot of work needs to be done to deal with housing issues raised in the area assessment for Wiltshire.

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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