

West Devon Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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of local public services

West Devon Borough Council

Overall, West Devon Borough Council performs well

Managing performance	3 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

Overall, West Devon Borough Council is performing well. It is doing well on the issues that local people think are important. It is making services more available to people throughout the borough. It recycles a high proportion of household waste. It is helping to bring new cheap houses to the area and reducing homelessness. It is working well with the police to reduce crime and anti social behaviour and is helping people affected by the recession. It provides higher quality services than many councils and at a lower cost.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for Managing Performance. Local people rate the Council highly and are far more satisfied than in many similar areas. The Council has increased the household waste it recycles and reduced the amount that is sent to landfill. The area is well kept. It has good parks and open spaces and streets are clean and free from litter.

The Council knows that it is important for local people, especially in rural areas, to be able to find out about and easily use the services they need. It is responding well to this challenge. It takes services, advice and information into local communities and goes to people's houses if they cannot get to a Council office. Even though the credit crunch is making it more difficult to provide new houses that people can afford to buy or rent, the Council has done well and delivered 128 affordable houses. The Council is working well with businesses to try to protect jobs in the recession.

The Council has worked well with the Police to reduce crime and anti social behaviour. Violent crime, robberies and vehicle crime have all reduced. The Council does a lot in its communities to promote good spirit and people in West Devon get on well. Also the Council encourages residents to be healthy.

The Council's scores for use of resources and managing performance are different. We have decided the Council performs well overall because it is doing well in the areas local people think are priorities and delivering good and efficient services. The Council has strong local leadership from its Councillors and managers.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for Use of Resources. It compares costs with other councils and looks at its services to see if they could be better or cheaper. It has shared services and jobs with neighbouring authorities and this gives good value for money. The Council's accounts were satisfactory but slipped from the high standard of recent years. Also it needs to improve how it checks the value for money it gets when putting time and money into working with other organisations.

About West Devon Borough Council

West Devon is a large rural district in the South West. It has a population of 52,000. One third of the population lives in the two major towns - Tavistock and Okehampton - and the rest live in smaller towns, villages and hamlets. Dartmoor National Park is within the Council's boundaries as well as two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 12 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The population is mainly white, with only small numbers from other ethnic groups. People's health is better than the average in England and there are higher numbers of older people. West Devon is a mainly rural area and this makes accessing services more difficult which can contribute to small pockets of deprivation.

The council is controlled by a joint administration of Conservatives and Independents.

The Council has five priorities:

Housing

The economy

The environment

Community wellbeing

Access to services

Organisational assessment

Housing

Many local people are concerned that house prices are not affordable. There are a lot of second homes in the area which pushes house prices up and local people have lower than average earnings. This means young people in particular often cannot afford to buy a house in their local area and have to leave. The Council understands this and works hard to help local developers

build new homes that people can afford.

The Council has worked hard with developers and uses planning laws well to encourage them to build a good proportion of houses that people can afford to buy or rent. In recent years the Council has achieved over 100 new affordable homes each year and in 2008/09 it delivered 128. At the same time the Council is reducing homelessness. It provides accommodation to those who need it. It is also good at providing advice that can prevent people becoming homeless. It reduced homelessness by 5% in 2008/09, and prevented 167 cases of homelessness - significantly better than last year. It helps people to afford to rent privately by helping pay deposits. It also encourages small families in large houses to move and free up space for others. No families are in bed and breakfast accommodation at the moment. However, the Council still needs to do more to make sure that it reduces the number of households living in temporary accommodation. The Council helps vulnerable people such as the elderly, disabled or those with mental illness with their housing needs. It helps victims of domestic violence by making their homes more secure. It also worked with Devon County Council to provide housing to meet the extra needs of some older people.

Economy

The Council has a good understanding of the local economy. It is working well to support existing businesses and encourage new ones. Priorities include creating a greater range of employment and better paid jobs. It aims to develop tourism, and bring in money from organisations like the government and development agencies. The Council helped to provide 16 new business units at the Okehampton Business Centre. It also makes good use of its own buildings. It has provided space to be rented by an NHS dental surgery at its Tavistock headquarters. In developing a site for a new waste depot, it will also provide units for smaller local businesses. It is working well with the private sector to develop tourism to boost trade in the area.

The Council has helped people in the recession. It provided funding for the Citizens Advice Bureau to support people and give advice about money problems. With South Hams District Council it published and distributed a guide for businesses and residents on where to find advice and assistance. But it is not as quick as other councils at deciding on housing benefits claims and paying people.

Environment

The Council understands that local people care about climate change and global warming and want the Council to work hard on these issues. The Council is better than many councils at recycling household waste. It recycles 43% of the waste it collects and is reducing the amount that has to go to landfill sites. During the year it expanded the garden and food waste it collects and composts. It employs an officer who works with local schools to reduce waste and recycle more.

The Council tries hard to make sure the things it does do not harm the environment. It makes sure that its composting happens locally. This supports business in the area and means less distance to travel, saving on fuel

emissions. It makes sure its new buildings minimise carbon emissions that cause global warming. They save water by collecting rainfall and save energy by having wind turbines and solar panels. The Council can do more to promote grants that local people can get to reduce energy use in their own homes.

Community Wellbeing

West Devon is a safe place to live and people get on well. The Council works well with local police and this is helping to reduce crime. During 2008-9, violent crime, robberies and vehicle crime all decreased, although domestic burglaries increased slightly. The Council holds community action days to encourage people to get involved in their communities. The Council gives money in grants to local people. This supports local projects such as play areas and activities in village halls. This also gives good value for money because local people add to the money they get from the Council by giving their free time. More residents in West Devon than many other areas feel that people get on well together.

The Council works well with partners such as Devon Primary Care Trust to improve the health of people in the area. It is working to reduce smoking and provide activities to promote healthy living. It has provided football pitches in Tavistock and land in Okehampton for a new building for the Girl Guides. The Council is also delivering projects to meet the needs of older people. It has worked with Devon County Council to develop 50 new supported flats for older people who need extra care.

Access to Services

Two thirds of people in West Devon live in rural areas. It is not easy for everyone to get to Okehampton or Tavistock to get in touch with the Council and its services. The Council has a good understanding of these difficulties and is working hard to address them. It works with partner organisations like the Citizens Advice Bureau, Devon Racial Equality Council and the police to visit communities together and provide people with information and advice.

The Council has now got 28 different organisations going out to where many of West Devon's residents are such as farmers markets, cafes, schools and village halls. The Council has also modernised and improved its customer centres for those who are in Okehampton or Tavistock.

The Council is making leisure and play activities available to as many people in the area as possible. It helped to deliver a play programme of activities to children and young people across the borough and contributed to the improvement of Meadowlands swimming pool in Tavistock.

The Council's political and management leadership is good. Leading councillors and officers have a very good grasp of what matters to West Devon's people. Residents' satisfaction with the way the Council runs things is higher than in most other councils. It has low levels of staff sickness absence and staff turnover. Councillors and staff receive basic relevant training but this could be improved.

The Council has consistently delivered good services at low cost. More

residents of West Devon than many other councils agree that the Council achieves good value for money. It checks services to make sure that they are good, low cost and meeting peoples' needs. It compares performance with other similar authorities and seeks to reduce costs and provide value for money through partnership working with other councils. It is good at improving services and saving money by teaming up with South Hams District Council. The Councils share some officers including the Chief Executive. Councils will be able to save more money for the taxpayer in the future when they know what the final local government structure will be across Devon. They can then work even more closely together by sharing information, staff and services.

The Council has traditionally been strong at managing money and reporting on its finances. There were some key staffing absences this year and this meant the Council was not as good as in the past. For example its accounts contained some minor errors before the audit corrected them. Also the Council needs to check that it gets good value for money from the staff time and money it puts into partnership working.

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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