

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

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Provided under embargo



for an independent overview
of local public services

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Overall, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council performs well

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	3 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

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is performing well. It manages performance well and provides good value for money. The Council is working well with its partners to tackle local people's priorities such as crime, making the area a clean place to live and providing things for young people to do. Seventy-seven per cent of people are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, which compares well with similar councils.

Children and adult care services are good. However, there are some areas that need further improvement. For example, support for some carers and the number of safeguarding referrals received. Also the gap in achievement between children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and their peers is variable and shows no consistent trend.

There are areas where vulnerable people receive good service. People who claim housing benefit receive a quick payment. Council tenants receive a prompt letting and repairs service. Money saved by the Council is being invested to improve services like the foster care and services for elderly people.

The Council has been successful in attracting external funds. Money from the Big Lottery and the government are funding the "Just Enjoy" and "Lets Go Outside" initiatives. Dudley has been awarded Healthy Town status. Future Skills for Dudley has won a government contract to help the long term unemployed back in to work. It is the only council to be awarded such a contract. There is also funding for major regeneration projects.

The Council is improving the overall appearance of the borough. Levels of

litter and fly-posting are low, but graffiti is still a problem. Most people are satisfied with the waste collection service. The Council knows that it needs to increase its improving household recycling rate and has plans in place to do so. It has worked with its partners, such as the police, to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour significantly making the borough a safer place for residents.

The Council is making good progress on providing affordable homes and raising the standards of existing homes. It expects that by 2010 all homes will be at the decent standard. Regenerating of North Priory Estate is progressing well and this will provide 314 new homes.

The recession has had an affect on the local economy with unemployment having risen by more than 50 per cent from June 2008 levels. The Council is focusing its support through its 10 point plan 'Dudley Means Business'. Strong links with local employers and the plans to regenerate the town centres are seen as opportunities for creating jobs.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for Use of Resources, which is good. The money it spends is linked to its priorities and supports service improvements. It seeks the views of local people effectively which helps the Council to decide on how money is spent. Overall the Council performs well and is low cost. The amount it spends on services for each person in the borough is lower than similar and neighbouring councils. Savings through efficiencies are redirected to priority areas. An easy to read summary of how the Council spends its money is available to the public on its website.

Councillors and senior staff are held responsible for the money they control. There are regular council meetings where councillors oversee budgets. Good anti-fraud and corruption arrangements are in place to protect the Council's money. Staff and councillors are trained on fraud prevention, and housing benefit fraudsters are prosecuted. Looking at ways of saving money is important to the Council. It has used new technology to allow some staff to work from home. Changes to contracts have allowed money saved to be used to do more home repairs. It reviews yearly how its partners manage their finances as the Council sees good financial management as an important part of working in partnership.

The Council is working with partners to provide buildings that will benefit the community. In partnership with the primary care trust (PCT) a specialist learning and disability and treatment centre has been provided. Also, a community centre is a key part of the plans for regenerating the North Priory housing estate.

About Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Dudley Borough is in the Black Country, West Midlands. The borough includes the five main towns of Dudley, Brierley Hill, Halesown, Stourbridge and Sedgely and Coseley. Dudley is densely populated with around 305,000 people. There are a high proportion of older people living in Dudley. It is expected the population will grow over the next 20 years but at a slower than the national average rate.

The area consists of a higher proportion of white British residents, with more ethnic diversity focused south-west of Dudley town centre. The overall levels of deprivation in Dudley differ little from the national average. However, there are pockets of severe deprivation locally and significant health inequalities compared to the national picture. The employment rate is above the West Midlands average and over the past 12 months there has been an above average increase in job seeker allowance claimants. The average earnings of people in Dudley are less than the regional and national averages.

The Council has worked with local people and agreed six priorities. Dudley's

priorities are

Caring matters

Environment matters

Safety matters

Learning matters

Regeneration matters

Quality Service matters

Organisational assessment

Caring Matters

The Council and PCT have committed to address diverse needs and health inequalities. A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies the key health risks in the borough. A new health and social care centre has opened in Stourbridge, and another is being built at Brierley Hill.

The health of the people of Dudley is close to the England average. Children's tooth decay, rates of road injuries and deaths are better than the England average. Early death rates from heart disease, stroke and from cancer are reducing. The rates for Dudley are now very close to the England average. However, heart disease is still the biggest cause of early death in the borough. There are big variations between electoral wards. Generally, wards in the south and west of the borough are more healthy and less at risk than those in the central and eastern part of the borough. This pattern largely reflects the degree of affluence and deprivation in the borough's population. Men from the least deprived areas can expect to live 7.4 years longer than those in the more deprived areas. For women this difference is 4.9 years.

Obesity is high in children and adults, and the number of people who eat healthily is low. However, the percentage of year six children who are obese has fallen to 20 per cent beating the target of 23 per cent. Children and young people are helped to make informed health and life choices. All schools have achieved the National Healthy School Standards. To change the lifestyle of people the Council is working with the PCT to increase activity levels and

improve people's diet. For example, travel plans are encouraged in schools and the workplace. These are supported by an interactive walking route website.

There is a higher than average number of adults who smoke in Dudley. The Council is working with its partners to encourage and support people to stop smoking. They have set up a Tobacco Control Strategy for Dudley, entitled Smoke Free Generation. A 'Counterfeit Kills' campaign was run in 2008. This was about helping people understand the dangers of counterfeit cigarettes, and to stamp out illegal sales of cigarettes particularly in the workplace.

The number of people that take regular exercise is low but rising. Numbers of adults who take part in sport are among the lowest in the country. But action has been taken to encourage sporting activity. Improved facilities at leisure centres has increased the number of members of health and fitness centres from 1359 in March 2008 to 2236 in March 2009. There has been a 37 per cent increase in leisure option cards holders since 2007. The under 16s and over 60s can now swim free.

Some new and better play facilities are coming for children and young people in Dudley but it will need to be seen if this has an effect on their health. A Big Lottery bid provided £690,320 for the 'Just Enjoy' play initiative. A further £4.5 million was received from the government Healthy Community Challenge Fund to support the Council's 'Lets Go Outside' programme. The money is being used to improve parks, play areas and nature reserves.

The quality of provision for children and young people whose circumstances make them vulnerable is mixed with some examples of high quality performance in education and care settings. All but one of the seven special schools are good or better as well as two of the four pupil referral units, with the remainder satisfactory. Three of the authority's six children's homes were judged to be outstanding, two good and one adequate at their most recent inspection and the local authority adoption service is judged to be good. However, the local authority fostering service is only adequate and the private fostering arrangements inadequate.

Vulnerable adults are being supported so they can live an independent lifestyle, but there is still more to do. Supported housing with carers is being provided instead of residential care. There are sheltered employment opportunities, smaller local day centres, and personal budgets for those able to manage their own care packages. Agreements with voluntary agencies have increased support to help the people of Dudley maintain independence. However there are shortages in housing particularly for young vulnerable people and second stage housing.

Some carers in Dudley have access to a wide range of support. This includes a carer's group and "Time Out" a three day break for carers. But the Council needs to improve support that it gives to carers so they can live a life of their own. Access to short breaks, transportation and sitting services do not meet the needs of some carers.

The number of older people living in Dudley is increasing. There was a 21.6 per cent increase in older people between 1987 and 2007. The Council is preparing well to meet the needs of older people, such as those who suffer from dementia. Its Older Peoples Strategy was identified as good practice in

the Audit Commission National report Don't Stop me Now. The strategy includes providing five extra care schemes. The Council has provided a guide called "Aging Well in Dudley", specifically for older people, as well as undertaking health and well-being initiatives to tackle increasing physical activity, obesity and smoking.

The Council has worked with its partners to improve hospital discharge services, so people do not stay in hospital any longer than they need to. For example, joint intermediate care teams are in place and it has employed a senior care homes supervisor to restore home care packages more effectively. However, delays remain higher than for similar councils which means there is still some work to be done. The Council has reviewed the cause of delays and has plans in place to deal with these.

People in Dudley benefit from the partnership approach the Council takes when dealing with safeguarding concerns. As well as improvements in safeguarding arrangements, links across the Council have benefited vulnerable people. There has also been improvements in the number of staff trained to recognise safeguarding issues. There is still some work to do to make sure that people have the right skills for the role they have in protecting vulnerable adults. The Care Quality Commission has suggested the Council reviews how it delivers the safeguarding service and considers effective ways of dealing with the increasing number of referrals it has been receiving.

Local people are being helped to claim welfare benefits that they are entitled to. More than 1,000 people were helped to claim attendance allowance and income support. Overall £2.4million of extra money was claimed. People who claim housing and council tax benefits have their claims dealt with quickly. The Council encourages people to claim housing benefit. It has used its computer systems to target elderly people who might have unclaimed entitlements. Staff that come in to contact with parents have been trained to provide help and advice about Working Tax Family Credit. This helps those on low incomes with families to support.

Environment matters

The Council is improving the overall appearance of the borough. Levels of litter are at a quarter of the level compared with 2006/07, fly posting levels are low. However, graffiti is still a problem with high levels placing the Council among the worst 25 per cent of councils. Forty seven per cent of people, which is below average, are very or fairly satisfied with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse.

Most people in Dudley are satisfied with the refuse collection service. Waste is incinerated with only a small amount going to landfill. Recycling of household waste has increased and the Council is beginning to close the gap between its performance and that of other councils. It can still increase the amount of recycled waste. To help it achieve its Waste Strategy it is investing in new recycling facilities. A new recycling, storage and transfer site at Blowers Green is proposed.

The number of extra homes and the number of affordable homes in the borough has increased. During 2007/08 542 additional homes became available across the borough. In 2008/09 200 affordable homes were provided

against a target of 110 homes. Regenerating of North Priory will see 314 new mixed tenure homes built to replace poorer quality houses. Good progress has been made in achieving Decent Homes and the Council is predicting all homes will be decent by 2010. People who are looking for a council home can take advantage of a new Choice Based Letting scheme. They can make bids for homes in areas they are interested in and receive one of the quickest council letting services in the country. Repairs to council houses are dealt with quickly.

The Council has not had an overall planned approach to dealing with the impact of climate change, but this is changing. With its partners a plan has been developed covering 2008 to 2011 to reduce the impact of climate change. This will make sure that work that has already been done contributes to the strategy, such as, sustainability building design used for schools. Not all activities across the borough are being measured in terms of Co2 savings or reduction. The Council knows that this is needed so it can see what is helping it to meet its aims.

Marches Energy Agency is supporting the delivery of some of the tasks in the climate delivery plan. Successful events have been run, like the Light Fantastic event at Brierley Hill. More than 600 people visited the exhibition and 1200 energy efficient light bulbs were handed out. A programme of training for council staff is planned to help them understand the impact of climate change and what they can do.

Safety matters

Crime and anti-social behaviour is falling in Dudley. Overall crime reduced significantly in 2008/09, achieving a 14.9 per cent reduction compared to 2007/08. Services are working well together to reduce anti-social behaviour through a series of successful projects. As a result, the rate of youth offending is lower than similar areas and reducing, as is the rate of relapse in to anti-social behaviour. The number of people on drug treatment programmes in 2008/09 was 996 against the target of 904.

Stretching targets to reduce violent crime, criminal damage and motor vehicle theft have all been exceeded. For example, the incidence of violent crime was recorded at 2080 against a target of 3277. The Council is working with partners to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Alcohol bans in town centres have reduced drunkenness. The 'Beat Sweep' scheme was used to target offenders and to reduce truancy. Money has been redirected into community safety activities. For example Police Community Support Officers have visited residents and provided advice on home security. Seventy seven per cent of people are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, which compares well with similar councils.

Dudley, in common with many other areas, is supporting the government in its work to address terrorism. The Council is working with the local community to raise the profile of terrorism and helping the community identify and tackle those issues that might encourage some people to become involved. Through the PREVENT strategy they are enabling local Imams to better engage with young people, and through 'question time' sessions discuss issues of concern with young people. A Muslim awareness week in the Merry Hill shopping centre has successfully helped people learn new and positive things about Islam. Most people in Dudley believe that people from different backgrounds

get on well together.

Regeneration matters

The Council is securing new industrial and commercial opportunities for the future. It has produced several planning documents to safeguard sites as well as identifying new opportunities for development. Plans are captured in the Black Country Joint Core Strategy, Brierley Hill Area Action Plan, Halesowen Area Action Plan, Stourbridge Area Action Plan and the Development Strategy Plan Document. It now has land available for development bought by Advantage West Midlands in Dudley Town Centre.

Plans for developing the borough are being delivered, but there is some slow down due to the recession. There has been a £30 million investment in Halesowen, delivering a superstore, car park and new bus station. Work has been completed on the Brierley Hill Sustainable Access Network, a new £25 million link road that is designed to reduce congestion and open up development land. New Heritage Regeneration Ltd has been set up to deliver a £300 million investment in Dudley town centre. However, a new developer is now needed for redeveloping Castle Hill.

Unemployment levels are rising due to the recession. With fewer new businesses being set up, and an increase in the number of businesses closing, communities across the borough are experiencing increased unemployment. Out of 24 wards 23 have seen rising unemployment levels. The biggest rises in unemployment in terms of numbers are in those wards with the lowest deprivation levels. But in percentage terms other parts of the borough have seen bigger increases, presenting extra challenges for partners. Unemployment across the Borough rose from three per cent in June 2008 to six per cent in August 2009. The Council has put in place a plan to support local people and businesses during the recession under the banner of Dudley Means Business. Dudley's response is to create economic and employment opportunities through regenerating the borough. Early recession actions have included roadshows targeted at employers.

Opportunities for local people to find employment are being increased. Regeneration projects are creating jobs for local people and future projects offer prospects for jobs. For example, 95 local people have benefited for extra jobs at the new ASDA, and employment and training opportunities were created on projects in Brierley Hill. Future Skills Dudley has been successful in winning bids for government work to help people back in to work. It helped 246 people in to work and provide training for 1991 local people during 2008/09. Dudley is the only council to have been given work to help the long term unemployed under the government's Flexible New Deal Programme. The four year Building Essential Skills for Construction Trades programme has seen over 1000 qualifications awarded. The Council works with employers on Local Employer Partnerships and during 2009 provided prerecruitment training for ASDA and the Child Support Agency.

However, the individual projects and programmes have not made enough of an impact on the total jobless and partners are falling far short of the target to reduce unemployment in Dudley. Dudley Council is now joining forces with the other six West Midlands councils and other organisations such as Job Centre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council to work more effectively on this

regional problem.

New businesses have been supported by the Council. To reflect the current economic climate, the target for new business registrations is 43 per 10,000 resident population against a baseline position of 47. The Council invests in the Prince's Trust Business Programme and supported 42 new business start-ups by young people in during 2007/08. It has reduced the percentage of working age people claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods and exceeded targets for the number of people aged 1864 moving into employment from within priority areas or groups.

Learning matters

Children Services are judged as good. Children in Dudley receive a strong start in care and education through good early years provision which compares favourably with similar areas and nationally. However, their progress is hindered through uneven primary school provision where despite some improvement, under half of primary schools are judged good or better in inspection. By secondary education this provision has improved with two thirds of schools judged good or better, a trend that is sustained in the sixth form college and further education. Judgements for staying safe and enjoying and achieving are in line or above similar areas and nationally across almost all inspected and regulated services.

Dudley continues to improve educational standards but it is not achieving its own stretching targets and achievements are mixed. At Key Stage 2 for mathematics and English children performed at the same level as those nationally. More children are getting five or more A* to C grades at GCSEs including English and mathematics. The proportion of young people gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications at ages 16 and 19 is in line with similar councils. A level scores are well above national figures.

Absence from school at secondary level is high, but attendance is improving. Dudley achieved its highest attendance figure for secondary schools in 2008. Extensive work is undertaken to target families responsible for persistent absence. Permanent exclusions have been reduced by almost 20 per cent between 2005 and 2008, and are now in line with similar areas and nationally. Local information confirms there has been a significant reduction in days lost through fixed term exclusions.

The Council is making good progress in enabling people of all ages and backgrounds to achieve their potential. During 2008/09 it performed better than most councils as the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training was better than for similar areas. The number of people aged 60 and over that participate and complete learning programmes has exceeded targets by more than five fold. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of young people entering young apprentice schemes.

Quality service matters

The Council is committed to services that have the customer at the centre and are efficient. Services are reviewed regularly and improvements made. The

revenues and benefit service has introduced home working for some staff that has improved service. Youth Services has shifted staff from back office work to increase the number of staff that work directly with a target age group of 13 to 19-year olds. Dudley Council Plus has made improvements in the service customers receive. For example, there has been a 45 per cent increase in telephone calls answered and fewer people give up their call because they cannot get through. From the autumn of 2009 a bigger programme of customer service improvements will start.

Money is being invested in services for vulnerable people. For example, the Council has increased its fostering budget so it can recruit and keep foster carers, and provide them with support they need. Extra money is being provided over the next three years to meet the rise in needs of an increasingly aging population. Investment is being made to encourage better standards of residential care and nursing homes. Learning disability services will get extra funding to continue to modernise services to clients.

New technology is being used to deliver better services. People looking for a council home can access the Choice Based Letting service through the internet or digital TV, where available homes can be viewed and applied for. There is an electronic booking system for home repairs. Radio Frequency Identification is being introduced in the library service to support self service and control the lending of books more effectively than it does presently.

The Council has exceeded efficiency savings targets for the past four years. It has strong and thorough budget monitoring and control procedures to make certain that value for money is achieved. Services look for value for money for customers. For example, housing managers understands the supply market well and use this to obtain benefits for residents. For example the paint supplier now provides paint discounts to tenants through a voucher which doubles the paint they get for their money. Local people are part of the process for buying services, but the Council needs to widen opportunities to more groups. Buying services for client groups such as mental health, learning disabilities and older people are examples of where service users have been involved.

The Council and its partners have a strong history of consulting and working with the local people. Dosti - an independent network leads on community engagement as part of the 'In it Together' project. To help the Council understand what local people want it consulted with more than 6,000 members of the community as part of the "Dudley Borough Challenge". This work was helped by Dosti, particularly with listening to harder to reach groups. An example is training Asian women to run workshops so they could meet with women in their community, and get their views on issues that affected them. The views that were gathered during the Dudley Borough Challenge have also been used to develop the Next Generation Local Area Agreement priorities. Children and young people are listened to and are involved in making decisions through 'Dudley Decision Making Kids' and the Youth Parliament. For example, children helped design the play strategy.

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/>



for an independent overview
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