

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

Pre-publication version dated 03 December 2009

Provided under embargo



oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Overall, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council performs well

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

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is performing well and is delivering improvements for local people.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (the Council) has a clear vision of what Stockton-on-Tees needs and is delivering against its priorities. It has good plans.

The Council has greatly improved the environment and created jobs in the borough. There are visible improvements because of the Council's regeneration work. Stockton-on-Tees is a safer place to live with falling crime because of the Council's work with partners (the police and fire service) through the Safer Stockton Partnership. More houses are being built but not enough are affordable. The Council is taking effective action on reducing CO2 emissions. Recycling is increasing and people are satisfied with their waste service, but people are still producing too much waste. A large number of people use the Council's libraries and participate in cultural events, for example the annual Stockton International Riverside Festival.

The Council provides good leadership across the borough. People can easily understand how the Council arranges its services and how it makes decisions. The Council is good at making sure money is spent on what is most important. It has the money needed to deliver its ambitions. Performance management arrangements are good and the Council has excellent capacity to continue to deliver improvements.

The Council has a strong value for money culture. It has a history of providing high-quality services at low cost. When costs are high, it is the result of careful

decisions to address local priorities. The Council can show improvements resulting from these decisions. It has continued to improve services when faced with limited money and increasing demand. The Council's services perform well. The Council involves local people in setting its priorities and planning its services.

The Council can do better in some areas. The Council and its partners face a major challenge to deliver some of their targets for improvement in the current economic climate. The Council, with its partners, is meeting 6 out of every 10 of its three year Local Area Agreement Targets at present.

Women are living longer in Stockton-on-Tees, but men's life expectancy is not increasing and there are significant differences within Stockton on Tees, on average a man in the least deprived areas lives 11 years longer than those in the most deprived areas.

Children and young people do well at school, but there are too many young people who are not in education employment or training. There had been a drop in the number of pregnant teenage young women but this has recently gone back up. There are too many overweight children in Stockton-on-Tees.

The Council is successfully modernising its care services for adults. However fewer older adults in Stockton-on-Tees than in other places have individual control of how they meet their needs and choosing what services they receive.

Overall the Audit Commission has scored the Council 3 out of 4. Its value for money score is 4 out of 4 and its managing performance score is 3 out of 4. Ofsted has assessed the council's Children's Services as performing well. The Care Quality Commission has assessed the council's Adult Social Services as performing well.

The overall organisational assessment score of 3 is a judgement based on the outcomes that the Council has achieved for the people of Stockton-on-Tees. While the Council has performed well, the Council working with its partners needs to achieve more to reduce inequalities around health, employment and skills and to improve its outcomes from children's services and social care services for adults, in particular to response the personalisation of those services.

About Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Stockton-on-Tees is located at the heart of the Tees Valley in the North East of England. The area is within easy reach of city shopping and leisure facilities, the coast and rural North Yorkshire as well as being home to industrial areas. There is a mixture of urban centres, market towns and villages and an expanding University.

The population of the Borough is increasing and is now 191,500 (up from 175,000 in 1991), and this rise should continue to 219,100 in 2029 (and, 221,100 in 2031). The Borough is a unique social and economic mix, with areas of severe disadvantage alongside areas of affluence.

Almost five per cent of the total population is from a black or minority ethnic community, but this too is expected to increase. Most of the people in Stockton who identify themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group are of Asian/Asian British origin.

The Borough forms part of the Tees Valley City Region, home to some 662,100 people living mainly around the lower Tees. It includes Stockton-on-Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Darlington and Hartlepool.

Organisational assessment

Economic Regeneration and Transport

The recession poses serious threats to the local economy in Stockton-on-Tees. The potential loss of jobs at Corus and the risks to the petro-chemical industry could seriously weaken the economy of the Tees Valley. Stockton-on-Tees is working with other areas to tackle these problems and the success of this partnership working will be crucial to the region's future. We will look closely at this next year.

People can see the impact of regeneration in Stockton-on-Tees. High-quality improvements have been made in areas like Thornaby, Billingham, Yarm and Stockton. Much government and private money has been attracted to support high-profile projects. The new footbridge over the Tees between Stockton and Thornaby and major arts and culture events are all successful parts of this regeneration.

Neighbourhood regeneration is making good progress in areas such as Hardwick, Mandale and Parkfield. The Council has a good track record in this kind of work. Support is being given to people in the community who need it most. The Communities Fund is being used to improve individuals' opportunities by developing skills and supporting employment. There are long-standing inequalities, but the gap between the most and least deprived parts of the borough is narrowing.

The Council has a focus on inequality in developing its regeneration schemes because of people not being in work and low skills; for example it seeks targeted recruitment and training opportunities for disadvantaged people on major projects. This has resulted in high numbers of people taking up training, achieving qualifications and getting work despite some recognised problems of accessibility because of travel and transport. The Council focuses on developing business-minded people from a young age through schools enterprise programmes. Adult education and learning are under the regeneration umbrella to ensure a strong focus on developing skills for work. The Future Jobs Fund scheme is being developed to encourage raised ambitions among young people. The Council works well with key partners such as the Learning and Skills Council, Job Centre Plus and voluntary sector providers. However the number of people claiming out of work benefits increased in line with the national picture. The gap between people of working age claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods and the borough average between 2006/07 & 2007/08 has narrowed.

The Council has ambitious plans to improve its arts and cultural offering for the people of Stockton-on-Tees. The Council promotes many high-profile events, including the Stockton International Riverside festival and community programmes to support Arts and culture in the borough.

More people use public transport and satisfaction with bus services is better here than in many other places. Improvements to the Tees Valley Bus Network and schemes like free bus travel for older people are giving older and vulnerable people better access to transport. People would like more information on when and where buses run. The Council continues to reduce the number of road networks needing repairs.

The Council performs well above the national standard in dealing with planning applications.

Environment and Housing

The Council has greatly improved the environment of Stockton-on-Tees. With the decline of traditional industries the council has transformed the green and built environment to provide attractive places to live and work. People are more satisfied with how the Council keeps their local area clean than people in other similar areas. The Council has good plans in place to minimise its use of natural resources. It is making good progress in reducing carbon emissions with ambitious targets to reduce emissions by a quarter by 2013. This will be especially challenging for non-domestic users where use is high. In June 2009, Stockton Borough Council became the first council in the North of England to meet the Carbon Trust Standard, for reducing carbon emissions and one of less than 100 organisations in the country to reach this level. Stockton is one of only two councils in England to self-assess at Level 3 for the national target on limiting the local impact on climate change. The Council achieves excellent performance for energy use for domestic properties, both public and private housing. Industry in Stockton-on-Tees produces more CO₂ than in most other areas. This represents a challenge for the council and its partners.

Waste sent to landfill has declined steadily since 2005/6, with most waste being burned for fuel. Recycling and composting has improved in that time and new plans are now completed. People produce too much waste, so The Council's performance on waste collected is below average. People are more satisfied with the waste collection service than in other areas.

There has been a significant decrease in the number of homes not reaching basic standards. The Council is taking action to ensure more affordable homes are made available in Stockton-on-Tees. Almost 300 are planned to be built in 2009 but there are still not enough. The number of homeless people has reduced and the Council has been effective in tackling homelessness among young people. Demand for adaptations to properties is high and the Council has invested heavily to reduce waiting times.

The Council's library service is high performing. Satisfaction with leisure services has increased, but for museums, theatres and to a lesser extent parks, is still below average. Three quarters of people in Stockton-on-Tees are satisfied with their area, the same as in other similar places. Fewer people think that people from different backgrounds get on well together, or treat one another with respect than in many other places. Fewer adults take part in

voluntary activities in Stockton-on-Tees than elsewhere.

The Council knows that more work is needed to make the local voluntary and community sector stronger and more effective. It is providing more support and is commissioning more services from the sector than it used to do. It will take time for this to make a clear difference to the sector as a whole.

Vulnerable people are better supported. Benefits claims are sorted quickly. The time people stay in bed and breakfast has reduced. The Council is providing better access to services for residents. It is not yet clear what difference this makes for disadvantaged groups or minority communities. The gap between the most well-off and most deprived areas of the borough is decreasing.

Safer Communities

The area is becoming safer for local people. The Council is a partner in the Safer Stockton partnership which is overseeing progress in this area. Most areas of crime have shown lasting improvement including burglaries, violent crime, vehicle crime and arson. Fewer young people are entering the criminal justice system for the first time. In common with other areas, more domestic violence incidents have been reported to the police since 2007 and the partnership must tackle this growing problem to make sure there are the right services when victims need them. Community safety continues to be a priority for local people but they believe the Council and police are dealing with their concerns. Crime is more of an issue for some communities in Stockton-on-Tees than others.

Children and Young People

The Partnership does well at improving the achievements and the well-being of children and young people. Children do well at school. GCSE results have improved and are in line with national averages. More young people than before in the Borough are going on to higher education. But some groups do less well. Most schools are good or better, but a small number of primary and secondary schools are not good enough. The "Building Schools for the Future" programme will modernise most of the secondary schools. More of the 16 to 18-year olds here, compared to similar areas and nationally, are not in education, employment or training.

The council and partners promote healthy lifestyles for children and young people. Many schools have been recognised for their good work on promoting healthy lifestyles and the numbers of children taking part in physical education and sport is good. There had been a drop in the number of pregnant teenage young women but this has recently gone back up. There are too many overweight children in Stockton-on-Tees.

The Council ensures that children and young people are safe. Support for children in need is good. Families get help so they can cope with issues by themselves. Children who are in the care of the Council do not suffer from too many moves to help them find some stability in their lives.

Healthier Communities and Adults

The health of people in Stockton-on-Tees is mixed and so is their access to the support that's available to them to improve their health. Importantly, death rates from the 'big killer' diseases in Stockton-on-Tees - heart disease, strokes and cancer - have fallen faster than the national average. But death rates, including early deaths from major illnesses are above the national average. The situation is getting better for women but it has got even worse for men.

Stockton-on-Tees is good at getting people to give up smoking and to take physical activity. It is less good at tackling alcohol misuse, child obesity, and teenage pregnancies though it is improving these services. So there is more to do to close the gap further with the rest of England.

The Council performs well in providing social care services. People are supported to stay at home and do not stay in hospital longer than necessary. They are involved in the services that are provided, but few people choose to take control of the services that they receive.

Organisation

The Council has the capacity to deliver effectively in the future. The Council has a clear vision supported by its elected Councillors and staff. It has resourced plans, and works well with partners to provide services. Its staff understands their part in delivering these plans. The Council has clear and effective leadership. It has good, flexible governance arrangements in place. Performance management arrangements are strong and the Council checks and reports on its performance effectively. The Council has clear targets and plans to address areas where it is not meeting targets. The Council, with its partner, has met 60 per cent of the targets in the new National Indicator Set, and most of the targets in its own Council Plan. The Council includes the Local Area Agreement in its reporting arrangements. The Local Area Agreement is performing well. People are more satisfied with the Council than in other places, and more people believe the Council offers value for money.

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
of local public services

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