

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

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of local public services

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Overall, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council performs adequately

Managing performance	2 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	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

Overall, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council performs adequately. This rating reflects concerns that the safety of children most at risk cannot be assured.

Many things the Council does are effective and these are making life better for people in Rotherham. It is providing high-quality care for older people, helping to increase recycling levels, improving energy efficiency and reducing crime. The Council is good at managing its money and is making savings. The Council has yet to demonstrate the impact of some of its programmes such as helping people to live healthier lives or improving the skills of people of working age.

Council leaders have developed a clear vision for Rotherham and show good leadership. Councillors focus strongly on improvement and work well with officers to make decisions and drive change. Councillors and officers have good information about the needs of local people and how well services perform. They have good systems to check how well their plans are put into practice and they keep tight control of budgets. They respond quickly to improve things if they find problems.

Fairness is an underlying feature of the way the Council works. It is one of only a few councils nationally to achieve the top level of the Equalities Standard for local government. In recognition of its efforts to deliver quality services, the Council has obtained the Government Customer Service Excellence Standard across all Council functions.

The Council works very closely with other public services and local

organisations. It works well with the Police to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. With NHS Rotherham, it has piloted a more intensive approach to reducing teenage conceptions with some encouraging results.

The scores for use of resources and managing performance are different. We have determined that Rotherham MBC should be scored as performing adequately. This is because for the second year the score for children's services has fallen. It is too early to say if the planned changes to services will improve safeguarding for vulnerable children.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing its performance. The score reflects the weaknesses found in how the Council makes sure that vulnerable children are safe.

Ofsted has rated the Council's children's services as performing poorly. Only a small minority of inspected services, settings and institutions are good or better. There are significant weaknesses in children's social care where capacity to deliver front-line services means that effective safeguarding cannot be guaranteed. Educational results between 2005 and 2008 improved but the gap with the national average on the measure of five A* to C GCSEs with English and Maths was not closing. Provisional data show a 6.6 per cent improvement from 2008 to 2009. It is too early to compare this with performance nationally. Children of Asian origin do less well than others. Only half its secondary schools are rated as good or better which is not good enough.

The Council has done well in reducing the number of 16-19 year olds not in education, training or employment. But there are still too many people without good enough qualifications and many of the working age population have no qualifications at all.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has rated the Council's adult social care services as performing excellently. The Council supports older people - and others who need care to live independently - well. The Council is successfully bringing in new developments: personal choice of services for older people; support for people to use direct payments to buy their own care; or help to stay in their own homes. It is effective at keeping most adults who are cared for safe from abuse, neglect or poor treatment.

The Council has responded well to the recession. Many people lost their jobs in this period - between June 08 and June 09 Rotherham suffered the sixth highest increase in the proportion of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance. The Council has devised some creative solutions to support people and, with employers and other partners, help them into new jobs where it can. There are still problems in helping the long-term unemployed back into work - a higher proportion of people than the regional or national average rely on state benefits because they don't have jobs or are in poorly paid work.

Not enough affordable houses (homes available for sale or for rent - or a combination of both - below the cost they would be on the open market) are being built in Rotherham. The Council needs to continue to work with developers and other public sector agencies to increase the number of affordable homes in the borough.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for its use of resources. It manages its finances well. It has made savings by reviewing budgets and being more efficient, releasing money to spend on the most important services for local people. It has saved £33 million from its budgets in the past four years - more than it planned. The Council consults local people, businesses and partners when setting its budgets.

The Council is improving the way that buildings are used, including sharing them with other public services. This means services can work together better and bring services closer to where people live. The Council has made it easier for citizens to make contact and get services online.

About Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Most of Rotherham's population lives in urban areas though large parts of the borough are rural. Half of the land is used for agriculture. The area has a population of around 253,400 people. The population is ageing in line with the rest of England. The borough's ethnic minority population is increasing, with most recent migrants coming from Eastern Europe. Currently 6.2 per cent of the population are from ethnic minorities; the largest group is people of Pakistani and Kashmiri origin who make up 2.1 per cent of the population.

People in Rotherham are generally not well off but, compared with other areas, poverty has decreased in the past five years. The greatest deprivation is found around central Rotherham and the eastern ward of Maltby: these are also the areas where there are most people not working. House prices are lower in Rotherham than nationally.

The health of people in Rotherham is worse than for England as a whole. There are also differences between the health of people within Rotherham: men and women in more prosperous areas are likely to live longer than those in more deprived areas.

Rotherham MBC has five themes which describe its most important areas for action. These are the same as the priorities of the Rotherham Partnership and are:

- Achieving: Rotherham is an area that is prosperous with a vibrant economy and flourishing town centre;
- Learning: People are skilled, informed, creative, innovative and challenging;
- Alive: People are healthy, feel good, are active and enjoy life;
- Safe: Neighbourhoods are safe, clean, green and well maintained;
- Proud: People have pride in the borough and Rotherham has a positive external image.
- Equality of opportunity and choice, and sustainability of economic development run through all themes.

Organisational assessment

Achieving

The economy of Rotherham grew strongly up to 2007 with more people in work and new businesses starting up in the borough. Because of the recession, some large businesses in Rotherham have closed and unemployment has risen steeply. There are still jobs available but most vacancies are taken by people who have just left other jobs. It is difficult for people who have been out of work for a long time, or who are disabled, to find work.

The Council has worked hard to deal with the downturn in the local economy. Where possible it works with employers before redundancies occur. This approach has been very successful: for example half the staff made redundant at one large local employer had found other jobs before the closure. The Council also has account managers who work with employers, Job Centre Plus, colleges and the Chamber of Commerce to co-ordinate services and help people find work.

The Council continues to attract higher skilled businesses - which are less affected by recession - into the borough. Its job is made harder because skill levels in the adult population are low. Fewer people are educated to level 3 or above (equivalent to A level) than the national average and many people have no qualifications at all. This means it will be more difficult for many local people to share in the benefits of future economic growth.

The Council works with employers to assess the skills needed - often basic literacy, numeracy and communication. Unemployment, though, is not likely to reduce soon in Rotherham. The Council needs to build on existing work with partners to drive the changes that are needed.

The biggest jobs challenge is to help people who have not worked for a long time or who are disabled and claiming benefits, to get work. More of these people live in the more deprived parts of Rotherham than in more prosperous areas. This hasn't changed much in the last few years.

Rotherham is continuing to redevelop its town centre to make it more attractive and bring new shops and businesses into the area. Redevelopment projects are carrying on thanks to public money. This should help to take advantage of changes in the economy and enable it to make a distinctive offer from shopping centres like Meadowhall.

Learning

Rotherham has not improved the educational achievement of its young people as much as it hoped. Achievement in the early years is improving. The Council has done some creative work to help very young children enjoy learning, such as the Imagination Library.

Results at primary school (Key Stage 2) and above have been improving slowly but are still below the national average, including for most minority ethnic

groups. The achievement gaps for those groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable, such as children from poorer backgrounds, are still too wide in the early years and at the end of primary school.

Recent unvalidated data show more hopeful signs for 14 - 16 year olds (Key Stage 4). These data indicate that 47.5 per cent of Rotherham's young people achieved five or more good GCSEs (A* to C with English and Maths) in 2009. This was better than the Council's results in 2008.

However, in Rotherham, Asian pupils are not doing well at GCSE, and the young people getting poor results more often come from deprived neighbourhoods than other areas of the borough. One secondary school is still rated as inadequate and only half its secondary schools are good or better which is not good enough.

More young people are gaining qualifications at level 3 (A level or equivalent) but the proportion is still lower than elsewhere in the region. It is also significantly out of line with the national picture. This needs to improve if new employers in higher skilled sectors are to be attracted to the town.

By working with schools, colleges and employers the Council has reduced the number of 16 to 19 year olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEETs). The level in Rotherham is better than similar areas and as good as the national average. The level is highest in the more deprived areas of the borough. The state of the economy more widely has resulted in fewer job opportunities which means the number of NEETs is likely to increase.

Inspectors have commended Rotherham Council for work - the Rotherham Ready initiative - to encourage enterprise amongst school children. It has inspired teachers and given confidence to children, particularly in primary schools, who have produced some good quality work.

Alive

Rotherham MBC works closely with NHS Rotherham to improve the health of the local population. Although people in Rotherham can now expect to live longer, there is a big difference in how long people live in Rotherham and in England as a whole, and within Rotherham between more well-off and more deprived areas. This hasn't changed in the last few years. The difference is bigger for men. Local health services - hospitals, community services and GPs - are good. But the Council and its partners are not being as successful as they would like in encouraging people to choose healthier lifestyles.

Rotherham MBC has invested heavily in leisure services. Three new leisure centres opened in 2008/09, with another to open in March 2010, and attendance is going up steadily. But too many local people are still overweight - 27.7 per cent compared to the England average of 23.6 per cent. The number of children who are obese is increasing, despite efforts by schools, health and voluntary organisations to encourage healthy eating and exercise. 85 per cent of schools have achieved healthy schools status and all are in the scheme. The high-profile Ministry of Food experiment (teaching people how to cook and to pass on this knowledge) was successful. The Council has expanded this, and there are other examples of good practice to try to

influence lifestyle. It's hard to tell if these are reducing obesity.

The number of teenagers getting pregnant is high. Despite attempts to improve sexual health and change behaviour numbers only fell by 10 per cent between 1998 and 2007. The gap with the national average has not closed. However, the number has fallen in 2008-9, and the Council hopes this will continue. The Council and NHS Rotherham have been working together to target the most vulnerable young people. This targeted work has achieved some success in reducing the number of pregnancies and is being extended to two more areas.

Not as many children take part in high-quality activities outside school - which provide opportunities to encourage healthy behaviour - as in other areas. The number is even lower in the more deprived parts of Rotherham. The Council's annual survey of young people shows some worrying trends, for example in alcohol consumption and smoking.

The Council has been rated as excellent in giving older people and people who need care services the support they need. It is also good at keeping them safe from abuse, neglect or poor treatment. The Council is doing particularly well in giving people budgets to organise their own care (personalisation). This includes people from all communities. Older people in Rotherham get good services to help them remain independent; intensive home care support has increased.

The Council applies itself to finding out what people think about the care services they provide and how people want their needs to be catered for. Most people are very satisfied with the support they get to stay at home.

Safe

The Council works closely with the police and other partners to make neighbourhoods in Rotherham safer. It has carried out successful pilot schemes in two of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. Residents have got more involved and trust has increased. Similar schemes are being rolled out in three more areas with high rates of crime and anti-social behaviour: this should lead to improvement for those communities.

The Council is working well to make its area assemblies and neighbourhood management stronger. It is showing that it can learn and keep getting better. It's piloting giving neighbourhoods their own budgets, so local citizens can genuinely put money into what they think is important.

The Council has a responsibility for the welfare and safety of vulnerable children. Only a minority of inspected services were found to make good provision for children to stay safe. In 2008 Ofsted rated the fostering service inadequate. The Council has worked hard to improve performance. A reinspection in 2009 rated the service as satisfactory but with significant improvements still needed. A separate inspection of contact, referral and assessment found that social workers do not have capacity to safeguard children effectively. It also found inconsistent performance in completing some social care assessments. Services have been assessed as performing poorly.

The quality of housing in Rotherham is improving. All Council properties are expected to meet decent standards - set by the government - by 2010. The Council has improved energy efficiency, removed many older, poor-quality homes and new housing has replaced this. A lot of new housing has been built on brown-field sites. It also has a good record on improving private rented housing.

Rotherham Council needs to do more to increase the number of affordable homes (homes available for sale or for rent - or a combination of both - below the cost they would be on the open market). The Council is working with private developers to make sure new homes are built, and the number has gone up in recent years. But developers are now investing less, because of the economic downturn. This means the level of unmet need is likely to increase.

More people are on the housing waiting list than in neighbouring boroughs. However, the Council is dealing well with homelessness: there are no families in bed and breakfast accommodation. The Council is on target for reducing the number of families in temporary accommodation.

The housing management arm of Rotherham MBC, 2010, had reasonable inspection results last year. Overall satisfaction of residents was good. However, it is now in financial trouble. The Council is working on an improvement plan to make sure that tenants' interests are secure and that public investment is protected. The future is not certain.

The Council has a mixed record for making sure that public spaces are attractive. It needs to work harder to reduce litter, but has reduced graffiti and fly tipping. It has increased recycling.

The Council has responded to climate change and wider sustainability issues. It has an Environment and Climate Change Action Plan. This is a priority for all directorates. The Council has analysed its carbon footprint and knows it has a big task in becoming more environmentally friendly. It is too soon to say whether its plans will work: this is a long-term issue and the national measures are new.

Proud

Rotherham Council and its partners work well together to promote pride in the borough. They want people to feel that Rotherham is a good place to live and to take part in making life in the borough better.

The Council often gets good comments when it asks people about the quality of services. It acts on what people tell it to make services better. This is at odds with the recent Place Survey which showed that people's views of how well people get on together, of crime and of the Council generally, are not very good. The Council needs to understand more about where and why perception differs from actual experience.

The Council has held high-profile community events, such as the Armed Forces Day, and has attracted well-known personalities to Rotherham such as Dolly Parton and Jamie Oliver. It celebrates and supports the diversity of its population which helps people to understand one another and get on better. The Rotherham Diversity Festival has grown over the past eight years into a

two day event taking place as part of the Rotherham Show and attracting more than 70,000 people.

The Council and police work closely together to make sure that extremism does not grow in the community. Shared intelligence has made good preventative steps possible. This is an area of good practice where Rotherham is ahead of other places. In April 2009, 'One Town One Community' was launched. This brings people from diverse backgrounds together to unite against hate and violent extremism.

The Council has responded to the challenge of migration from the European Union. It has developed information and training for new residents in the borough. The idea is to educate people from diverse backgrounds about how public life in Rotherham works, and make sure that people get on well with their neighbours.

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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