

Torbay Council

Organisational Assessment

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of local public services

Torbay Council

Overall, Torbay Council performs adequately

Managing performance	2 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 Torbay Council performs adequately. It is continuing to improve and is delivering in a number its priority areas. It is strong in the areas of crime, children and young people and adult social care. It is tackling the economy and helping in the recession. But it does not do as well as other councils at recycling, housing benefits and homelessness. It needs to do more to address the needs of the least well off.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. It has done well to increase its Ofsted rating from performing adequately to performing well. Exam results are improving faster than elsewhere. The Council, in partnership with Torbay Care Trust provides good services for adults that need care such as older people or people with learning disabilities. The police and Council are working well together to reduce crime including night time violence. Fewer residents now think there is a problem with drugs or drunk and rowdy behaviour in public. The Council is tackling the Bay's weak economy. The Mayor's Vision recognises the importance of economic prosperity and is driving improvements. The Council is helping new businesses to come in and existing ones to grow. It has worked hard to combat the recession. Torbay has delivered good numbers of new homes, many affordable to buy or rent, although, as in most areas, this is still below current government targets. It keeps the bay clean and tidy.

The Council has had some success in tackling climate change. It has developed plans to reduce carbon emissions that lead to global warming and to reduce the water and energy it uses. It has significantly increased recycling of domestic waste but is still worse than many south west councils. The work on Torbay's economy is encouraging but results will take a while to come through. Unemployment is the highest in the south west and productivity is low.

There are some areas where the Council does not do as well as others. Housing Benefits has been one of the Council's weaker services in recent years and we will be inspecting this later in the year. The Council has worked hard to try to prevent homelessness but problems remain. The Council can do more to bring empty homes back into use quickly. Also it has not yet prepared strong enough plans to address the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly ageing population.

Like some other seaside resorts Torbay has pockets of deprivation - poverty and poor housing and health. The Council and partners such as the police and Torbay Care Trust recognise the issues and have introduced some initiatives. But these are making few obvious differences yet and plans to improve are not clear or joined up.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for use of resources. It achieves adequate value for money. It is good at matching its money to the issues that local people think are important. It has a reasonable understanding of its costs and performance in all areas. The Council is taking an innovative approach to the way it works with partners to deliver better services and save money.

About Torbay Council

Torbay is an urban area in South Devon in a region known as the English Riviera. It is a popular tourist destination placed along 35 kilometres of coastline. Most of residents live in the towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

Torbay's population is 134,000 and this rises by up to 50% during the busiest holiday periods. The age profile is older than average and the ethnicity of the area is mostly white, with numbers of black and minority ethnic people below average.

Unemployment is high in the area and wages are low. Most jobs are within the services industry, with tourism also accounting for a high number of jobs. Health of local people is in line with the national average.

Torbay Council is a unitary authority led by a Conservative Mayor and controlled by the Conservative party which holds 24 of 36 seats.

The Council has four priorities. These are:

Pride in the Bay

Learning and skills for the future - children and young people

The new economy

Stronger communities

Organisational assessment

Pride in the Bay

The Council had some success working with other organisations to tackle climate change. It has developed plans to reduce carbon emissions that lead to global warming and to reduce the water and energy it uses. It encourages local people to reduce energy use and minimise the waste they produce. More people are using buses.

The Council has exceeded its own waste recycling targets this year and was the most improved Devon authority but, at 33% the rate is still below many south west councils. It has improved services to local people in many ways, for example, by introducing garden waste collections and increasing the types of materials that people can recycle. It has also improved recycling centres making them easier to use and has carried out campaigns such as 'Watch your Waste Line'.

During the year Torbay Council achieved five blue flags for its beaches. This is down from seven a few years ago. Preston has since lost the award but continues to hold one of nine Quality Coast awards in the Bay. Torbay still has the second highest number of Blue Flags and Quality Coast Awards in the country. The area is well kept - the Council deals well with fly-tipping, graffiti and abandoned vehicles.

Torbay Council has a scheme in place that encourages young people to take pride in their environment. Rewards are given to young people who help with beach cleaning, rubbish collecting, and planting bulbs in parks. Also the number of vulnerable, disadvantaged and older people who enjoy culture and leisure is high. More people over the age of 55 use libraries, museums and galleries. There is good use of facilities by black and minority ethnic groups and by those with disabilities.

Learning and skills for the future - children and young people

The Council performs well for children and young people. For the majority of indicators that Ofsted measures, the Council is at least in line with the national average and the average for similar councils. This is an improvement since the last time the Council was visited for a joint area review in 2007. At that time all aspects of provision were judged to be adequate except for "helping children and young people to achieve economic well-being" which was good.

Most of the Council's inspected services and settings are rated as good or better. This includes keeping children safe and helping them to achieve educationally. Exam results have been improving at a better rate than the national average in recent years. But only half of the Council's secondary schools received an Ofsted rating of good or better. For "keeping safe enjoying and achieving" performance measures from Ofsted show that the Council is average or better compared with similar councils and all councils nationally. The local authority's fostering and adoption agencies are good as are measures to identify and monitor private fostering arrangements.

Results are mixed for children and young people who are vulnerable - for

example those from poor backgrounds or who have special needs. Half (three out of six) of the indicators Ofsted uses to measure the gap in outcomes for vulnerable children got worse this year and half improved.

Torbay is investing in learning and skills and improving access for local communities. Nearly £33 million is being spent on new schools, including £16.8 million towards the new Torquay Community College (TCC). The new college offers a wider range of services such as an adult learning centre for the community, a library and a crèche. This will increase the potential for community involvement. There will be better sports amenities with a new artificial sports pitch.

The new economy

The Council is getting to grips with challenging economic issues in Torbay. The Community Plan, 'Turning the Tide for Torbay' and Mayor's Vision recognise the importance of prosperity and the need to create different types of jobs. The vision also recognises the need to significantly improve the local economy. Each town in the Bay has different economic needs and the vision recognises these and shows how they can be best met.

Torbay is dealing with some tough challenges. Torbay is heavily reliant on tourism and there are big differences in wealth across the Bay. Average earnings are below the regional and national average. Increasing people's skills is a high priority for the Council and South Devon College is helping make this happen.

The Council is working hard to help people and business in the recession. It is, paying bills quicker, and funding credit unions that help protect vulnerable people from loan sharks. Torbay Pound gives access to banking for people with financial problems.

The Council and others are also taking action to improve the Bay's economy in the future. The Council through Torbay Development Agency has a good understanding of what needs to be done. The Council is spending over £5.4 million on Brixham's new fish market building which includes a restaurant and offices. It is also planning to use council buildings and land to support a number of schemes to regenerate the area. The numbers of 16 to 18 year olds not in education, employment or training are relatively low and decreasing. An Ofsted survey in the year showed good partnership working and prioritisation as well as high quality learning programmes for these young people.

Proposals for a South Devon relief road from Kingskerswell to Torquay are a good opportunity to create new jobs. But more work is needed to think about exactly how these jobs can improve Torbay's economy.

Housing and the delivery of affordable housing is a clear priority for the Council. Its understanding of housing needs and markets is good. Torbay has delivered a comparatively good level of new homes although, as in most areas, this is still below what local people need. The credit crunch and housing slump have caused most areas to fall below their targets. The Council has enabled a good supply of homes that people can afford to rent or buy. But this is still not enough and there are high numbers on waiting lists for social

housing as well as overcrowding. The Council has had a positive impact on improving private sector housing conditions for example, by improving non-decent housing and the energy efficiency of homes. The existing housing supply could be used more effectively by further improving performance on bringing empty homes back into use and supporting reductions in underoccupation of homes.

A high proportion of Torbay's citizens do not work. Torbay has the highest number of benefits claimants in the south west. Of particular concern is the high level of incapacity benefit claimants. The Council has sought deliberately through take up campaigns to ensure that residents receive all the benefits that they are entitled to. The Council does not provide a good service to people claiming housing benefits and has not achieved value for money. It is slower than other councils in deciding and paying claims and has not qualified for all the money from government that it could. The Audit Commission is shortly to conduct a detailed review of this service.

Stronger Communities

The Council engages with stakeholders and service users including those who are at risk of disadvantage. It supports 12 community partnerships and forums to represent the interests of local people including those from minority and disadvantaged groups.

Like other seaside resorts Torbay has pockets of deprivation where people lack work or have low pay. This can be made worse by the associated problems of poor housing and health. These areas can have higher numbers of people who have issues with smoking and drinking. They may have more problems with crime, and violence in the home. The Council and partners such as the Police and Torbay Care Trust are aware of these issues. They spend more money in deprived areas and are working together in a neighbourhood scheme in Hele to address local problems there. It is too early to see if this will improve people's lives. Currently the approach is small scale and needs expanding (there are plans for this). Also the Council and its partners have not set out in detail what positive results they hope to see. This means they are less likely to know if the project is working before they roll it out to other areas.

The Council has worked hard to try to prevent homelessness but problems remain possibly because of the Bay being a popular place especially in the summer. The numbers of people accepted as homeless is high. This puts pressure on Council services. The use of temporary accommodation for families and the length of time people live in hostels and bed and breakfast is a concern. Encouragingly a new homeless hostel has recently been opened at Factory Row.

The Council works well in partnership to improve the safety of local people. There have been several improvements over the last twelve months that make Torbay a safer place. Crime overall is down and violent crime linked to the night times has reduced by 25%. There is good co-operative working with pubs and clubs. Also the Safe Bus provides support to anyone in need on the Harbourside and the SASH campaign supports vulnerable young women. Local people are pleased about the decline of problems at the Harbourside at night. Fewer residents now think that there is a problem with drugs or drunk

and rowdy behaviour in public.

The Council, police and partners are doing more than ever before to tackle domestic abuse. They have promoted a 'Speak out, break free' campaign, set up a specialist domestic abuse court and established an independent support service. The Council runs a family intervention project to help 40 families with problems. As a result there have been improvements for these families in school attendance and their health. Also the families have been getting into less trouble and this saves money for police, council and criminal justice organisations.

The Council and its partners are working well with young people in the community. In less well off wards they have recruited street wardens to help with neighbourhood activities. The Council consults with young people on how it should spend £1 million on improving parks. Police and Council Wardens work well with international students to advise them and this has improved the way in which they integrate. A Joint Inspection of the Youth Offending Service in Torbay found that it was well managed and does well.

The Council with Torbay Care Trust provides good services for adults that need care such as older people or people with learning disabilities. Because the two organisations work so closely people have good access to professionals to meet all their needs without delays. Torbay is good at identifying people with care needs and supporting them quickly. Carers too receive good support. Increasingly more people are supported to live at home in Torbay. Health and social care staff work closely, using just one recording system to ensure that they provide a service that is joined up and where everyone knows what each other is doing. More people who need care are receiving money directly to spend on their needs as they choose. The Council with partners have set up many good features to make sure that people who might be abused are identified and kept safe.

But it has not yet prepared plans to address the issues of an increasingly ageing population. There are high numbers of over 85 year olds and over 50s in the Bay now and these numbers are rising faster than most other areas. This will bring pressures as well as opportunities to the area and the Council should start preparing now.

The Council has achieved level 3 (of 5) of the Equality Standard of Local Government. This is a reasonable performance that about half of councils have achieved to date. Also the equalities group within Torbay Council has made a strong impact on race and equality issues. The Council is using research undertaken by the Police about equality and diversity to identify and reach out to people. For example, there is now a clear approach in place to help gypsies and travellers and a community liaison officer helps sections of the community when needed.

The Council has a good vision of what it wants to achieve in the future. Its ambitions are based on a clear understanding of what local people think are the important issues in the Bay.

The Council's council tax levels are just below average when compared with south west councils. The Council is good at matching the money it has available to the things it thinks are important. For example it spends more on priority areas like social care and housing. In other priority areas such as street

cleaning it manages to achieve good performance at low cost. This helps the Council get good value for money. The Council has made the savings it has needed in recent years. It has now started on an ambitious programme to save an extra £10m in the next three years.

The Council has a reasonable understanding of its costs and performance in all areas. It collects useful information and reports this clearly to staff and councillors. It is starting to use this data to improve some, but not all services. For example it is now investing more money and effort into housing services. Also it recognises it needs to do more to improve housing benefits and waste management. The work in these areas is still in its early stages and there are only limited visible improvements so far. The Council is good at using its assets - such as buildings and equipment - to get value for money. For example it shares them with other organisations including community groups.

The Council is taking an innovative approach to the way it delivers services to residents. It is working closely with partners such as the police and Torbay Care Trust to provide more services jointly. It aims to provide better services at lower cost. The Council has changed its own management structure to work towards this goal and this is now becoming established. It has increased the training it gives to staff and councillors. This has led to greater understanding of roles and responsibilities.

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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