

Ipswich Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

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of local public services

Ipswich Borough Council

Overall, Ipswich 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	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

Ipswich Borough Council performs well overall. The Council is tackling issues that local people recognise as priorities. These are: everyone should have a decent roof over their head, people enjoy good health, there is work for all, create a better environment for the people of Ipswich, people keep safe and people live in friendly and supportive communities and have a greater say.

Ipswich scores 3 out of 4 for managing performance. The Council consults people on their views and these influence its plans.

The Council is taking steps to make it easier for people to use its services but progress with this varies. For example, the introduction of a housing repairs and maintenance contact centre led to better information and speedier resolution of problems. Following the launch of the Council's new web site the level of use has stabilised. The Council set itself a number of targets to improve customer services but progress to achieving these is poor. Long term plans to introduce a telephone contact centre are still to be agreed. Only 55 per cent of the Council's buildings meet the access requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

The Council is managing its resources well and has been able to balance its books over recent years despite increasing costs and the need to deliver efficiency savings. It has delivered savings of £2.056 million (2008/09), in addition to saving from the previous year of £3.8 million. Some services cost more than those in other councils for example sports and leisure, but budget decisions are made in the light of what is important to local people. The approach to working with partner organisations has improved with more adding value to the work of the Council. It is developing plans to prepare its workforce for the future.

In general, the Council is performing well in contributing to the delivery of the town's community strategy.

The number of new homes built in Ipswich last year exceeded expectations. A significant investment was made to continue improving the quality of Council housing stock. However, while the number of new affordable homes built was more than planned the Council is still not meeting demand and suitable land is becoming hard to find. Plans to improve the availability of housing did not all deliver the improvements the Council wanted.

The Council is contributing to improving the health of local people. It has taken effective action to improve leisure facilities in the town. This contributes to healthy lifestyles. The home emergency response service provides support for elderly and vulnerable people although its future is currently under review. The Town and Bridge and Triangle projects are supporting the development of healthy lifestyles with a view to reducing health inequalities. Successful partnerships such as with the Bangladeshi Support Centre have been developed to improve the health of local people. However, the speed at which benefits are paid is not as good as the Council hoped and progress with tackling fuel poverty is not as good as planned. The Council has decided not to support free swims for the over sixties on the basis that it cannot afford to lose revenue.

The Council is demonstrating leadership in supporting the priority of work for all. Economic activity is still at a comparatively high level in Ipswich. In 2008/09 the overall employment rate improved marginally and was just above the national average. The Council led the successful 'Ipswich Fighting Back' media campaign to combat the effects of the recession. It is actively supporting improvements in education and training through investment in new educational facilities. Despite this the number of new jobs and businesses planned did not achieve targets set as a consequence of the economic downturn.

It is reducing its own carbon footprint and helping others to improve the environment. It is also making the town cleaner and increasing the amount of waste it recycles and composts so that it is above average when compared to other Council's. But public satisfaction with waste collection has decreased and the amount of waste collected, whilst reducing, is still too high.

The overall levels of recorded crime in Ipswich are the highest in Suffolk and increased last year. Burglaries, robberies and violent crime rose last year although sexual offences reduced. Street drinking is an issue in some parts of Ipswich where there are pubs and clubs. The Council is working with partners to improve community safety and reduce anti social behaviour. Partners have had a major impact on reducing street prostitution through a 'joined up' approach to social problems that lead to prostitution. Work to deal with anti social behaviour and to support vulnerable members of society who are at risk of crimes including domestic violence are being progressed and making a difference; for example in the levels of sexual crime. Although targets are being met to reduce road accidents the numbers of people killed or seriously injured on Ipswich roads were much higher than expected although lower for the number of children and young people.

Satisfaction with Ipswich as a place to live is improving but people do not feel they belong to their neighbourhood. Residents feel that generally people treat

each other with respect but this has fallen significantly since last year. The Council is taking action to understand and work with its local communities better. Area forums are giving people a chance to influence decisions about where they live although the difference they are making varies. The Council and its partners are helping vulnerable people, for example supporting employment and training opportunities for those with learning disabilities. It has introduced initiatives to encourage the integration of different communities such as the highly successful Mela festival. But it still needs to do more work to make sure that race equalities are routinely considered in all aspects of its service planning and delivery.

The Council's corporate plan provides a vision for the transformation of Ipswich and is based on what is important to local people but more could be done to improve delivery. Some of the business plans to support the delivery of this vision are incomplete and do not focus enough on what is important to local people. The ability of the Council to deliver environmental health services is limited by staff numbers and skills in some areas. Some decisions have been delayed by the review of local government in Suffolk. Monitoring the way that services are performing and taking action to improve where things are not going well is inconsistent. Not all of corporate plan aims can be monitored and so the Council's picture of performance is not complete.

Suffolk organisations are developing options for a way forward for public services. Proposals focus on organisations working together and empowerment of local people to solve local issues. This should help reduce costs at a time public services funding is likely to fall.

About Ipswich Borough Council

Ipswich is a relatively urban borough in the county of Suffolk. It has a population of approximately 121,000 and a significantly high population density. Population growth in Ipswich is expected to be higher than the average for the rest of the region and England. Currently the different age groups in Ipswich are similar to the rest of the country, although there are slightly fewer old people. Ipswich has more people from different backgrounds than the regional average, with relatively large Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities. It has seen a rapid increase in new communities with a large number of Portuguese, Polish, Lithuanian, Iranian and Iraqi residents. There is a higher proportion of migrant workers in Ipswich compared to regionally. The borough is relatively deprived when compared nationally. Wages are low, and there are more people claiming benefits than the regional average. A high proportion of employment is within public administration, education and health. Housing is relatively affordable when compared to the rest of the county, generally the cheapest in Suffolk. People of Ipswich are generally as healthy as the rest of the country. There are inequalities however, for example the difference between how long men and women live is shorter in the most deprived areas than in the wealthiest areas of Ipswich.

Ipswich Borough Council has 48 elected councillors. 19 Conservatives and eight Liberal Democrats share control of the Council. There are 21 Labour members.

Ipswich Borough Council has listened to local people, including those who vulnerable and harder to reach and agreed three priorities for improvement.

These are detailed in the Council's corporate plan 'Transforming Ipswich' 2008 to 2011:

Transforming and modernising customer access to services,

Do the basics better for less and

Taking forward the town's community strategy which includes;

everyone should have a decent roof over their head,

people enjoy good health,

there is work for all,

create a better environment for the people of Ipswich,

people keep safe and

people live in friendly and supportive communities and have a greater say.

Organisational assessment

Transforming and modernising customer access to services

The Council wants to make it easier for local people to contact them and get the services they want but progress is mixed. The Council has introduced a benefits helpline and an on-line benefits calculator. A repairs contact centre for housing tenants has improved the quality and speed of service with increased customer satisfaction. Choice based letting is providing more choice and better information on council houses and on some private sector properties. The customer services centre is established in the centre of Ipswich. There are longer opening times, for example it is open on Saturday mornings, make it easier for the public to get help. Plans to improve customer services are not delivering the improvements at the rate expected. In 2008/09 the percentage of customers seen in 15 minutes fell from 75 per cent to 63 per cent.

The Council's web site has been improved and there are more on line services in place. Following the launch of the Council's new web site the level of use has stabilised. There continues to be an increase in the number of people making use of on line payment facilities although the rate of increase is slowing. The Council no longer delivers the 'Borough Council News' to each household. Some residents now collect it from local shops but this means that its circulation is much less. Long term plans to introduce a telephone contact centre have still to be agreed.

Only just over half of the Council's buildings meet the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act and the number of designated car parking spaces for people with disabilities is well below the Council's target.

Do the basics better for less

The Council is improving value for money and has delivered significant savings over the last two years. By working with partners, the Council is able to do things more cheaply for example joining with Colchester museum service and developing joint legal services with other district councils. It has worked with an external consultant to change the way the revenues and benefits service is delivered. This is improving the speed and quality of service whilst reducing costs by one million pounds. A partnership programme in housing has also led to savings of £300,000.

The Council controls its costs well and has saved £2.056 million in 2008/09 as a result. This is in addition to savings of £3.8 million made in the previous year. It is using its purchasing power to buy equipment and services at lower cost, saving £278,000 last year. Savings are being made without a significant impact on the quality of services delivered to the public. Despite these savings, some service areas are high cost such as sports, leisure and housing but budget decisions reflects what is important to local people.

The Council is investing to continue to deliver savings in the future. It has a £3.4 million deficit in the budget for 2009/10. Plans are in place to identify savings. The Council has entered into a four year partnership to identify further efficiencies and to improve the skills of staff to identify opportunities to create further savings.

Taking forward the town's community strategy which includes;

Everyone should have a decent roof over their head

The availability of housing is increasing but not always at the planned rate. 275 of the new homes built last year were affordable homes. This was above the Council's own target, but less than needed by local people. Empty properties are made available for re-use far more quickly, but this still takes 24 days, which is longer than the Council's target. The Council has worked well with the private sector to enable unused properties to be put back on the market. A choice based letting scheme has been introduced which provides more choice and better information for those wanting council homes. The quality of housing is being improved but progress with longer term planning is slow. The Council and its partners are investing more resources, £12.75 million, to achieve national standards for the quality of Council housing. The Council is confident that it will achieve this standard next year but it did not make the progress it expected last year. Housing repairs and maintenance services are being delivered more quickly. The introduction of a housing repairs contact centre has meant that customers can be dealt with more effectively.

People enjoy good health

The Council is contributing to improving the health of local people for example 'stop smoking' clinics in its customer services centre and support for adult

'healthy eating' initiatives. The home emergency response service provides support for elderly and vulnerable people, although its future is currently under review. The Town and Bridge project aims to 'improve the health and emotional well being of people aged 45 to 74'. It is specifically designed to reduce health inequalities as measured by differences in mortality rates. Outcomes include the setting up of two ActivAge centres which provide activity, hot lunches, advice and information for older people. The Triangle project has obtained funding to run food, fitness and fun sessions from the Dicken's Road shop 'Our Space'. However the speed at which benefits are paid is not as good as the Council hoped for and progress in tackling fuel poverty has not been as good as planned.

The Council has taken effective action to improve leisure facilities in the town, which contributes to healthy lifestyles. Public satisfaction with sports facilities, museums and parks is above average when compared to other councils. The Council spends more money than other similar councils on culture and leisure services. It is investing in the refurbishment of swimming pools in the town such as the Fore Street. The 'Team Ipswich' leisure brand has been expanded to encourage greater use of leisure and sporting facilities. Links to Olympic games activity and promotion is good and one of the local gyms is shortlisted for an Olympic training camp. Successful partnerships have been developed to support the health of local people such as Aqua Confidence sessions, Lebed chair based exercise and the development of exercise groups with the Bangladeshi Support Group. Despite this the Council has decided not to support free swims for the over sixties on the basis that it cannot afford to lose revenue.

There is work for all

Economic activity is still at a comparatively high level in Ipswich. In 2008/09 the overall employment rate improved marginally and was just above the national average. Ipswich has 'growth point status' as part of the Haven Gateway Partnership meaning it has been identified as an area for growth in housing and employment opportunities. The Council led the successful 'Ipswich Fighting Back' media campaign to combat the effects of the recession. Despite this the number of new jobs and businesses planned did not achieve the targets set and the number of visitors to Ipswich has fallen as a consequence of the economic downturn.

The Council is investing heavily in arts, culture and regeneration and this has encouraged further economic investment. 1,070 new homes were built in Ipswich during 2008/09. This exceeded what the Council planned to deliver. The Council has shown its support for improving learning and skills through its investments in University Campus Suffolk, Suffolk New College and 'Suffolk One' the new sixth form centre for South and West Ipswich to be opened in 2010. Further new developments are in the pipeline such as student accommodation being built on the Orwell Quay and new retail and hotel developments in Grafton road. However none of the milestones on the local development scheme, designed to ensure for example that there are enough land and buildings for business development, were met.

The Council and its partners take effective action to support vulnerable members of local communities. The Town and Bridge project for example has attracted external funding to develop community gardens. There is good

support for social enterprises such as the Ipswich Furniture Project, providing employment opportunities for those with disabilities. The St Lawrence Centre and St Peter's Church have been developed as centres for the local community.

Create a better environment for the people of Ipswich

When compared to other councils, an above average number of residents are satisfied with the cleanliness of Ipswich. In the last year the Council has made good progress, for example in removing graffiti and fly tipping more quickly. It has significantly improved the removal of detritus, such as leaves from the streets. Satisfaction with waste collection and recycling has decreased. Ipswich is sending less waste to landfill compared to other councils and is above average in the amount it recycles and composts. However the Council did not improve as quickly as it planned in these areas and it is still collecting more waste than it wants to.

The Council is contributing to environmental sustainability targets. It is reducing the amount of carbon dioxide it is producing for example by making its properties more energy efficient. It is encouraging local people to use their cars less for example by building three kilometres of cycle ways instead of the two planned. It is working with partners to increase its ability to become more environmentally sustainable.

The Council does not have enough people to deal with environmental enforcement. Despite improvements it has not been able to deal with all noise complaints. Only about three quarters of the air quality reviews planned have been completed, and health and safety inspections are well below target.

People keep safe

The overall levels of recorded crime in Ipswich are the highest in Suffolk (around 30 per cent) and increased last year. Burglaries, robberies and violent crime rose last year although sexual offences reduced. Despite this local residents feel that steps are being taken to deal with anti social behaviour but see drunken disorder and alcohol related crime as an issue.

The Council is working with partners to improve community safety and reduce anti-social behaviour. The Council and its partners have had a major impact on reducing street prostitution. Work to deal with other forms of prostitution is progressing well with a strong focus on helping those most at risk. Plans are in place to support people who have 'chaotic lifestyles' and who repeat offences. Working with the police, the Council is providing activities for young people helping to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour in some areas. It is making sure that vulnerable people, at risk of crime, are being supported. For example, it provides beds for those sleeping rough, and extra support for parents whose children are behaving in an anti-social manner. 'Town Pastors' are looking after people particularly at night and helping to tackle problems of street drinking in the town centre. Projects in the Town and Bridge ward and the Triangle estate are successfully reducing levels of anti-social behaviour and low level crime in these areas. The numbers of people killed and seriously injured on Ipswich roads was much higher than expected although the

number of children and young people was lower.

People live in friendly and supportive communities and have a greater say

There are increasing levels of satisfaction with Ipswich as a place to live. A higher than average number of residents feel that people get on well together. However there are low levels of volunteering and civic participation and people do not feel that they belong to their neighbourhoods.

The Council is working with local communities to better meet their needs. It has set up area forums to allow people to make decisions about their local area although up to now their impact has varied and has mainly linked to improving the local environment. The Council has invested in developing profiles describing each Ward in Ipswich. The information is being used to apply for external funding although it has not yet influenced the way services are planned and delivered. The Council has improved work with local communities for example setting up park management boards. The Council works with a voluntary organisation which provides support for migrant workers. Although progress has been made in this area engagement with some migrant communities is less well developed.

The Council is not yet taking full account of the needs of all sectors of the community in planning and delivering its services. It has only achieved the first level of the national equalities standard despite plans to achieve level two. The framework is adopted by 90 per cent of councils and councils report on where they are against three levels; developing; achieving and excellent. Level 1 means they think they are still developing equality. Equality is about fairness and not discriminating against people or groups because of their race, age, gender, disability, sexuality, faith or belief. The Council acknowledges that it needs to do more in providing equalities advice. Data relating to equalities such as which groups use services is not routinely analysed and used for improvement. The Council is investing to improve its approach to equalities. It has introduced some training for managers but this has not been used with all staff. Despite this, it has introduced initiatives to encourage the integration of different communities such as the highly successful Mela festival.

Corporate

The Council's corporate plan provides a vision for the transformation of Ipswich and is based on what is important to local people. Business plans are in place to convert the vision and aims into reality. However, plans for this year are not all complete and it is not always clear what the Council hopes to achieve from individual plans. Targets do not focus sufficiently on what difference the plans are expected to make to the lives of local people. The Council recognises that the approach to business planning is variable and is taking steps to improve this for the future. If changes to the administration of local government in Suffolk proceed there is a risk of resources required for other projects being diverted to deal with local government review (LGR) implementation. Some decisions have been delayed by LGR such as delays to web site development.

The ability of the Council to deliver its services is limited by staff numbers and skills in some areas. The Council finds it difficult to recruit and retain some specialist staff such as environmental health officers, resulting in the use of expensive temporary staff. Plans to improve recruitment in these areas have not been successful. Also, as part of the way it is dealing with budget gaps, some staff that leave are not being replaced. The Council is introducing plans to develop junior staff to take over the roles of more senior staff when they leave but these are not yet fully in place. It is improving staff skills through training particularly the development of management skills but opportunities for councillor training are not taken up consistently.

The Council is improving the way it monitors how well it is doing. Monitoring the way that services are performing and taking action to improve where things are not going well is inconsistent. By developing further common ways of working and reporting councillors and managers are better able to make sure services can be improved. For example, concerns about high levels of staff absence have been identified and challenging targets supported by actions, put in place to improve attendance. But these are at an early stage of implementation and impact is not yet demonstrable. At the moment not all of corporate plan aims can be monitored and so the Council's picture of performance is not complete.

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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