

Fareham Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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of local public services

Fareham Borough Council

Overall, Fareham 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

Fareham Borough Council performs well. The Council is providing good value for money and is managing its performance well.

The Council is good at keeping Fareham clean and attractive. The appearance of West Street and Titchfield Square has been improved by regeneration projects. There are low levels of graffiti and abandoned vehicles are dealt with quickly. Residents are recycling more than last year although satisfaction with waste collection and street cleaning is generally low. The Council could do more to understand its carbon footprint and how to reduce it. It has helped to deliver 124 affordable homes which is above target and is preparing well for new development of up to 8,000 houses, commercial buildings and community facilities in the north of the Borough due to start in 2014. Vulnerable people have been targeted with the launch of a supported lodger scheme as well as a 'dry house' for drug/alcohol users. The Council has supported and made positive progress in two large scale projects to improve the prosperity of the borough in the future. It has also put some measures in place to help residents through the recession. Crime is low and the Council is continuing its work on reducing alcohol related crime. Domestic violence is a key priority for the borough and there are plans in place to tackle this. The Council is working in partnership to deliver a new community hospital in the west of the borough and has improved the health of some local people by increasing their level of physical activity through the GP referral scheme. It has invested in several community facilities including new football facilities at Hill Head. However, plans to build a new swimming pool in the west of the Borough have been delayed. The Council has yet to bring together its knowledge of local communities and their needs in order to shape local priorities. Consultation is improving with the introduction of the Community Action Teams. However, engagement with harder to reach groups such as Black and Minority Ethnic is still developing. In the future, the Council needs to

have a clearer picture of the needs of its community, so it can be sure that its objectives reflect local priorities. This will become even more necessary as Fareham's population expands through future housing development.

The Council makes good use of its resources. It has good leadership and makes difficult decisions when necessary. Staff and Councillors work well together and levels of staff absence are the lowest in Hampshire. However, the Council needs to make sure that it has enough staff with the correct skills to deliver its future objectives. The Council has a strong awareness of its financial situation and has achieved double its efficiency target. It uses value for money reviews to identify efficiency savings and improve services such as the debt collection service and Ferneham Hall. The Council delivers well against its corporate priorities which are monitored regularly. There are several well established partnerships although it is not always clear how these improve life for local residents. Although the Local Strategic Partnership is developing and has agreed joint objectives, it has yet to assess how its activities make a difference locally.

About Fareham Borough Council

Fareham is located mid-way between Portsmouth and Southampton in the county of Hampshire. The borough is generally prosperous. There are low levels of unemployment and average weekly wages are the fourth highest within Hampshire. 88 per cent of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live.

Around 110,000 people live within the borough making it one of the mostly densely populated districts in Hampshire. The population is expected to increase by 5.4 per cent over the next twenty years. The proportion of older people is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the region and a 6.8 per cent increase is expected by 2029.

The majority of residents are white, with the amount of people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups small in comparison to the rest of the South East.

The health of residents is better than the national average with very small inequalities between different groups. Fareham has low levels of crime although incidents of violent crime remain high in some areas.

The council is led by the Conservative Party who hold 22 of the 31 seats; the remainder are held by the Liberal Democrats (9 seats).

Fareham BC has identified seven corporate priorities which support the vision of Fareham being 'the prosperous, safe and attractive place to be':

- Protecting and enhancing our environment
- Maintaining and extending prosperity
- A safe and healthy place to live and work
- Leisure for health and for fun

- A balanced housing market
- Strong and inclusive communities
- A dynamic, prudent, progressive, best practice Council.

Organisational assessment

How well is the organisation delivering its priority services, outcomes and improvements that are important to local people?

Protecting and enhancing our environment

The Council works effectively to keep the place clean, green and attractive. The introduction of manual sweeping and the reorganisation of area teams have decreased the amount of littering, fly tipping and fly posting visible in the local area. Abandoned vehicles are dealt with efficiently. Fareham has won awards for its open spaces and natural environment such as overall regional winner and gold award at the South and South East in Bloom and a Green Flag award for Holly Hill Woodland Park. Both West Street and Titchfield Square have been improved.

Fareham recycles more than 42 per cent of household and garden waste which is well above the Hampshire average. It has made good progress in improving the amount of collections from flats and to reduce unwanted items in recycling bins. Latest figures suggest that 91 per cent of residents are recycling correctly. Satisfaction with waste collection and street cleaning services is low compared to the rest of Hampshire. This has been linked to the fortnightly collection cycle and the Council has consulted with local people to try and reach an appropriate solution.

The Council supports local businesses, residents and voluntary organisations to help them reduce their carbon use. The Council has agreed an action plan to help tackle climate change and has confirmed its commitment to this by signing the Nottingham Declaration. Plans for how the Council intends to reduce its own carbon footprint are still developing. The Council has taken some steps to reduce its impact on the environment such as putting sustainable travel plans into action and purchasing fuel efficient refuse collection vehicles. It is also looking at ways of publicising and informing residents of its approach and any results.

Fareham Borough Council performs well in deciding planning applications quickly, exceeding local and national targets. Customer service has been improved through the introduction of a specific planning enquiry centre within the Council's contact centre and a good website. Satisfaction levels with the service are good. The Council has completed assessments of all its 13 conservation areas which will be used to record and protect the characteristics of these areas.

Maintaining and extending prosperity

The Council is working well to support residents to help them overcome any immediate effects of the recession. The housing benefit service processes new applications quickly. The Council have allocated additional resources and improved its working with Job Centre Plus to ensure that this level of performance is maintained during the recession. This means that local people are quickly provided with financial support. Other initiatives include 'Fareham Savers', a community banking project in Hill Park and additional funding for a housing debt advisor at the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Council has supported and made positive progress in two large scale projects to improve the prosperity of the borough in the future. Work on the town centre shopping area has begun and a new supermarket has been given planning permission. In the current recession, both schemes have been subject to delay but the Council has maintained a strong focus on the longer term benefits for the area. Fareham Borough Council is preparing well for a major development in the North of the Borough. A site has been identified which will include up to 8,000 new homes, as well as commercial buildings and community facilities. Work is due to start in 2014. The Council has created a community liaison group to help build a vision for the new community. It is also taking initial steps in understanding the potential impact of this development on its own services.

Traffic congestion in Fareham remains a major concern for local people. The Council has had some success in helping to improve traffic conditions locally. Most local schools have agreed school travel plans. These plans include improved safety measures outside schools to be enforced by civil enforcement officers and police officers and help relieve congestion during peak times. Initial funding to begin a Bus Rapid Transport scheme between Gosport and Fareham has been agreed through the County Council and Government and work is beginning on Phase 1.

A safe and healthy place to live and work

Crime is low in Fareham; the total number of crimes recorded is below the Hampshire average and below that of its most similar council areas. However the number of violent crimes remains high in parts of the borough and incidents of theft have increased. The Council works well with partners to reduce crime and continues to reassure residents that Fareham is a safe place to live. The Community Safety Partnership is effective. It has completed an assessment to identify priorities for the borough although residents feel that public services should ask for their views about local crime issues and how to tackle them more regularly.

The Council works well with partners in delivering initiatives focused on reducing crime within the local community. A 'no cold calling zone' has been introduced to help protect vulnerable people against domestic burglary and hotspots for criminal damage and arson have been identified and monitored. Improving activities for young people has been highlighted as a key priority by local people. The Council is aware that there this is a gap especially over the weekend and is working with Hampshire County Council's youth service to address this.

The Council and partners work effectively to reduce alcohol related crimes. It has banned selling alcohol to under 21s in some areas of the borough and is educating residents about the risks of alcohol through targeted leaflets. A borough-wide Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) has been set up to control the drinking of alcohol on streets and incidents of public drinking have reduced.

Reducing domestic abuse is a priority for Fareham. There were a large number of incidents reported last year with 24 per cent of these were repeat offences. There are plans in place to address this. Domestic violence alarms have been installed in high risk places and the partnership has improved the quality of information available about domestic abuse services.

The Council's contribution to improving the health and well being of local people is still developing. The Council is working in partnership with Gosport Borough Council, Havant Borough Council, and Hampshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and this group has identified its key priorities. These are to reduce obesity, increase physical activity and improve the wellbeing of older people. The scale of these issues varies across the three areas and the partnership faces challenges to find joint projects which will make a difference in each area. The majority of activity is led by the PCT. Good progress has been made in increasing physical activity in adults through its GP referral scheme. Vulnerable people are supported to participate in physical activity through specific initiatives such as 'Chair-Aerobics' sessions. Evaluation of these schemes is basic and is not yet used to improve the service.

The Council needs to make better use of feedback along with other information from partners so activities can be better targeted at individuals most in need and encourage those who have yet to start exercising regularly. The Council is making good progress to make sure residents can access health services and is working with partners to deliver a new community hospital at Coldeast in the west of the borough. The hospital is due to open in spring 2010.

Leisure for health and for fun

The Council has invested in a number of community facilities in 2008/09. These include opening new football facilities at Hill Head, improvements at Ferneham Hall (£1.1 million) and Burridge Village Hall (£350,000). However, plans to build a new swimming pool in the west of the Borough have been delayed. However, the Council is committed to delivering this facility and is working to confirm a suitable site. The Council is working towards making Ferneham Hall more efficient and user friendly following a full review of its programme and processes. The review was led by the Council and included a survey of users and non-users and detailed analysis of current activity, processes and structures. As a result, the theatre has broadened its programme and has revised fees and charges to cover its costs. It is using a more commercial approach to marketing and selling tickets through a more efficient service. Ticket sales and the number of sell-out shows are both increasing.

A balanced housing market

Fareham Borough Council has made good progress in providing residents with different housing options. The number of people on the housing waiting list has decreased from 1852 to 1548 and the Council's approach to preventing homelessness is making a difference. The number of households living in temporary accommodation has decreased from 124 to 65. This means the Council achieved the Government target of a 50 per cent reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation ahead of schedule. It has also introduced accommodation specifically targeted at vulnerable groups; for example, a supported lodger scheme for teenagers and a 'dry house' for drug/alcohol users who have received treatment and need accommodation.

The Council has exceeded its own target by delivering 124 affordable homes this year. Fewer houses are expected to be delivered next year due to the economic downturn but plans are in place for a further 200 homes by 2011. The Council is working with developers and housing associations to widen the range of affordable housing options available to residents. These schemes such as intermediate rent, social rent and shared ownership are targeted at people in most need.

Strong and inclusive communities

The Council's knowledge of its communities and their needs is incomplete. It has lots of information about users of council services but this is not yet been brought together and used to better understand the needs of these communities. It is establishing partnerships to agree local priorities in areas of most need such as in the Fareham Park area. This work is still at its earliest stages and it is important that key partners and local groups are involved to build a detailed knowledge of people's needs so that services can be better targeted.

The Council's approach to consulting with local people is under-developed. Residents have been encouraged to use forums such the Community Action Teams (CATs) or by commenting on specific strategies such as the Sustainable Community Strategy. A 'customer access panel' has been recently formed and work to develop a 'disability forum' is ongoing. The E-Panel is up and running. Membership is representative according to age, gender and ethnicity as outlined in the 2001 Census. This reliance on historical data means that any recent changes to the local community are not reflected within the panel. Residents from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are not well connected with the Council. There has not been any targeted consultation with these groups. The Council has created a BME steering group but results following these meetings are unknown. The Council has been working with Hampshire County Council and consulting with local people to identify potential sites for Gypsy and Travellers. It is starting to explore ways to expand its understanding of the wider welfare needs of this vulnerable group. There has been slow progress in assessing how services impact on minority groups through completing Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). The completed EIAs are mixed in quality and content and their impact in changing services is not yet clear. This is important in helping making sure that Council services meet the needs of all residents. This area is a key priority for the Council and its approach to understanding and supporting its communities will become more important as future developments mean that Fareham's population is likely to expand dramatically.

Does the organisation have the leadership, capacity and capability it needs to deliver future improvements?

The Council is managing its resources well. It has good leadership and is prepared to make difficult decisions when necessary such as charging for additional green waste sacks. It has a flexible and adaptable workforce. The Council has reacted positively to changes in demand on particular services during the economic downturn by transferring colleagues across departments. Councillors and Officers work well together and the rate of staff absence is the lowest in Hampshire. The Council has an overview of its future workforce needs and there are examples of additional knowledge and skills such as project management being brought in when necessary. However, the Council needs to develop its plan to include more detail so it can predict any further gaps and fill them at the right time.

The Council has a good track record of delivering efficiencies. Possible savings are identified through value for money reviews and detailed plans have been put into place to generate savings over the next two years. For example: the Council identified that different departments were using separate procedures and companies for debt collection. The Council is looking to consolidate its approach and the service is becoming more streamlined, cost efficient and customer focused as a result.

The Council has a strong awareness of its financial position and how much each service costs to deliver. It benchmarks this information with similar councils to identify spending reductions; such as £135,000 in its annual insurance premium costs. The Council has started to use this information to get a better insight into residents' priorities. Recent consultation included cost information for each of the Council's services. Participants were told whether these services were essential or discretionary and asked to prioritise them. The results will be used to inform the 2010/2011 budget and will make sure that corporate priorities better reflect local need.

The Council monitors its corporate and service priorities on a regular basis and there are some examples of the Council using this information to challenge how services are provided. For example; residents were reported to have low satisfaction with waste collection due to fortnightly collections. The Council highlighted the additional costs for weekly collections and residents said that they would be unhappy with an increase in Council Tax. The refuse collection remains on a fortnightly cycle but the Council has employed Waste and Recycling officers to promote recycling and provide advice about the best way to dispose of household waste.

The Council has good links between its corporate objectives and financial plans. This has been further improved through the redesigning of service plans. These plans are now called 'Local Service Agreements' and include information about key actions, associated measures of success and their cost. However, performance management and associated targets are not always concerned with improving results for local people with too much emphasis placed on internal processes. Measures used to highlight performance are not always relevant. Further work is needed to establish a stronger set of indicators which clearly highlight results achieved under these priorities. The

Council will be revising its corporate priorities in 2010 and will be asking local people to help agree its future objectives.

The Council has a mixed amount of success through partnership working. There are good examples of the Council working with partners to deliver specific services such as building control, community safety and the Portchester Crematorium. The Council is an active member of the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire. The Council has improved working with its partners in the Local Strategic Partnership and has help the partnership to develop joint objectives. This is beginning to better co-ordinate activities. However, the partnership has yet to assess how these activities are making a difference to local communities.

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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