

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Overall, Tonbridge and Malling 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

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council performs well overall. The Council has consulted effectively with local people and it has sound plans to tackle issues that they think are important, these are set out in eight local priorities.

The Council provides excellent services for local people and they have improved further over the last year. It is working effectively to provide new homes and jobs and to renew its main shopping area in Tonbridge. A range of activities involve young people in planning the future of the area. The Council provides good support for vulnerable people and vulnerable children in particular. It keeps the area clean and it is working well with partners to make the district a healthier and safer place to live. Recycling levels are among the best in the country. The overall cost of services is low, and the Council provides good value for money. The Council manages its resources well and it has good plans to keep improving services.

Tonbridge and Malling scored 3 out of 4 for managing performance. It is making good progress against almost all its priorities and excellent progress against some. Despite the recession, it is refining its long term plans to rejuvenate Tonbridge town centre. It is reducing homelessness and delivering a good supply of affordable housing for local people. The Council makes a good job of keeping streets clean and improving open spaces. A high proportion of domestic waste is recycled. For the longer term the Council is preparing to make a contribution to tackling the problems of climate change and it is already starting to make progress in this area. Vulnerable people are well supported. The Council is working with partners to tackle crime and disorder, to improve the health of local communities and to meet the particular needs of young people. The new Tonbridge Gateway reception is helping the

Council and its public and voluntary sector partners to provide more joined up services for local people. The Council is well organised and effective. It has good plans to maintain these improvements.

Tonbridge and Malling has coped well with the recession. Although the Borough is prosperous, the recession has reduced income for the Council and increased demands for services. Increased demands for benefits have put pressure on the Council's services, but it is still meeting its targets for processing claims. It has started to provide an e-benefits service to provide a faster more accessible service and it is bringing in additional staff to complete the scheme. The Council has worked with Shelter to assist householders affected by the recession. The Council is operating a government funded scheme to allow businesses to defer business rates. It has worked with developers to protect the supply of new homes, including affordable homes. It is making sure that new shopping proposals come forward in Tonbridge, despite the uncertainty of the recession.

Compared to other districts in Kent, local people have a very positive view of the way that their council runs things and a high proportion feel that the Council offers good value for money. They are pleased with the standard of sports and leisure facilities and parks and open spaces. Generally, they are happy with the Borough as a place to live and consider that it is kept clean. They feel that they enjoy good health. They have reservations about some aspects of antisocial behaviour and tips/recycling facilities.

Tonbridge and Malling scores 3 out of 4 for use of resources. It knows what local people think is important and it has strong plans which make sure that the Council focuses on these. The Council's financial position is strong. It manages its finances well and delivers good services at low cost compared to its neighbours. It keeps its costs low by reviewing its services to make sure that they are effective, purchasing wisely and working in partnership. It scrutinises its performance closely and understands the risks to future performance, though this could be developed more fully.

Councillors work well with managers and staff. The Council trains and develops its staff to make sure that it has the right people to help it to deliver good services. Staff are well managed and well motivated. They are positive about improving services for local people. The Council has a clear picture of its workforce requirements in key improvement areas.

About Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Tonbridge and Malling is a district in west Kent. It is a predominantly rural area, much of it within the London Greenbelt. About 116,000 people live in the district. The main centre is Tonbridge but there is also a good range of services in the smaller town of West Malling. There are smaller local centres in Hadlow, Borough Green and Aylesford. The minority ethnic population is about 3 per cent of the total.

Tonbridge and Malling is relatively affluent. Compared to other parts of the County, local people have high average earnings, unemployment is low, fewer

people rely on benefits and they are relatively healthy. Three localities do show signs of deprivation. These are East Malling, Trench and Snodland East.

Tonbridge and Malling Council has 53 elected councillors. The Conservative Party is in charge with 46 councillors.

The Council has worked with local people to agree eight priorities. These are:

- Promote and support the sustainable regeneration and economic development of Tonbridge town centre
- Secure a continuing supply of affordable housing and work to prevent homelessness
- Involve, safeguard and meet the needs of children and young people
- Achieve a cleaner, smarter and better maintained street scene and open space environment
- Promote, encourage and provide opportunities for healthy living
- Work with partners to increase community safety
- Achieve with our partners the priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy for Tonbridge and Malling (2009/12)
- Make a positive local contribution to tackling the causes and effects of climate change.

Organisational assessment

Promote the sustainable regeneration of Tonbridge town centre

The Council has maintained steady progress on its Tonbridge town centre redevelopment proposals. It has reviewed the main scheme, for the 'Botany site' with the developer to take account of the recession. It is agreeing a phased proposal to enable it to proceed. This will improve leisure and community facilities as part of the wider shopping scheme. The Council has commissioned design brief on a second key site and agreed a scheme for a third. Because the town centre is liable to flood, it has assessed flood risks with the Environment Agency, to guide future proposals.

Secure a continuing supply of affordable housing and work to prevent homelessness

Working with developers and housing associations, the Council is providing a good supply of affordable homes. Two hundred and fifty one affordable homes were completed in 2008/09 against the Council's target of 240. The Council estimates that it can deliver a further 500 affordable homes over the next three years. It has used government funding to make more properties

available for rent. This has helped developers to weather the recession. The Council has worked effectively to prevent homelessness, by supporting people at risk of homelessness. It has also met its targets for providing decent homes for vulnerable households. It has recognised the particular needs of gypsies and travellers and it is preparing an action plan to deal with these. Benefits performance improved in 2008/09 and this is helping the Council give good support to vulnerable residents.

Involve, safeguard and meet the needs of children and young people

The Council has worked well to improve services for young people. It uses the Local Children's Services Partnership to help it understand their needs. It has also established a Children and Young People's Study Group and Youth Forum. It has used research to help it design youth services, including new sports and play facilities and measures to help vulnerable children. This includes a work experience scheme, a scheme for free access to leisure centres and support from the Youth Alcohol Outreach Worker. The Council runs a summer activity programme, which achieves high levels of satisfaction from the 1,300 young people joining the scheme at 13 venues across the district. Nearly a quarter of these are vulnerable to some degree and qualify for concessionary rates.

Achieve a cleaner, smarter and better maintained street scene and open space environment

Streets in Tonbridge and Malling are particularly clean and tidy and recycling rates are among the best in the country. The Council has used high profile campaigns to combat littering and it has targeted problem areas, for example through the 'Snodland Goes Cleaner' campaign. The Council has improved its car parks and achieved 'Green Flag' status for its key country parks. The Council is looking to improve standards further through its new Street Scene Action Plan and through smaller scale improvements with parish councils.

Promote, encourage and provide opportunities for healthy living

Working closely with PCT and voluntary sector, the Council is engaged in a range of health projects through the Choosing Health Fund. Nearly 2,000 young people have been involved in the programme at schools and youth clubs. The Council is involved in a range of partnership actions on physical activity including smoking, obesity, sexual health, alcohol, mental health and meeting the needs of an ageing population. Nearly 500 people with health problems have benefited from a lifestyles programme at Larkfield Leisure Centre. Health programmes focus on more vulnerable communities including Snodland, East Malling and Trench Ward. It is working through the Community Health Platform pilot to encourage better health for young people, with a focus on sexual health, alcohol and drugs. The Council is keeping 15 air quality problem locations under review and working with partners to tackle problems. As a result it has achieved air quality improvements on most sites.

Work with partners to increase community safety by tackling acquisitive crime, anti-social behaviour, perception of crime, substance misuse and violent crime

Crime is low compared to the County average and fear of crime is falling and is now the lowest in County. The Council works effectively through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) to achieve its community safety objective. The Council is involved through the CDRP and the Safer Towns Partnership in a range of activities. These include: graffiti control; fly tipping actions; domestic abuse management; alcohol control zones; anti cold calling campaigns and monitoring with CCTV. The Council has worked successfully through the CDRP to secure the closure of a social rented property which had been a focus for anti social behaviour. It has recruited additional Police Community Support Officers in problem areas. Overall crime has fallen, with anti-social behaviour reducing and criminal damage down 18 per cent. Although more young people are offending, rates of re-offending have reduced. Arrests of 12 to 17 year olds linked to alcohol misuse have fallen, following work by the antisocial behaviour officer.

Achieve with our partners the priorities set out, in the Sustainable Community Strategy for Tonbridge and Malling

Performance in this area has been limited so far, but the Council is laying the foundations for the future. It is establishing performance management for the draft sustainable community strategy. This builds upon processes that have been put in place for monitoring Kent Area Agreement targets. The partnership is, for example, scrutinising progress on 5 targets where the Kent partners are underperforming, to help it take action to improve things. Make a positive local contribution to tackling the causes and effects of climate change The Council is making good progress with its climate change strategy. It is providing warm home assistance and solar hot water assistance grants, which contributed to a 3.6 per cent improvement in home energy efficiency in 2007/08. Energy efficiency schemes have been implemented in leisure centres. The Council is requiring larger planning proposals to include measures for a 10 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂). It is doing other things to raise awareness of climate change. It works through local schools and it is supporting the Hadlow carbon community and Transition Town Tonbridge initiatives, which promote sustainable living.

Prospects for improvement

Tonbridge and Malling Council is very well organised and it has good plans for future improvement, based on consultation with local people. Resources are tight, but the Council manages its budgets well and it is good at getting external funding to tackle priorities. It has a good view of the workforce that it needs to continue to improve its services. It is taking steps to train its staff and to recruit the right people to help them. It uses information from its

Annex 1

Borough profile to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of its vulnerable communities. It is currently reviewing its community strategy and this will help the Council to coordinate the work of its partners to address local priorities.

Annex 1

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/>

Alternative formats - If you require a copy of PDF documents in this site in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call: 0844 798 7070

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



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