

# Rossendale Borough Council

## Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



**oneplace**

for an independent overview  
of local public services

## Rossendale Borough Council

### Overall, Rossendale 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	2 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

Rossendale Borough Council is performing well overall. It has clear priorities for improving its services and the quality of life for local people. It has improved many services over recent years. Local people's satisfaction with the area and with Council services has improved but is still lower than in many other areas, and fewer people than elsewhere feel that they can influence decisions. The Council is working hard to understand local needs and to link with local communities. It is providing good support to disadvantaged people.

The Council and its partners share a vision for the district: "By 2018, Rossendale will have strong communities with an enhanced environment and heritage. It will be an attractive place to live, where tourists visit and employers invest." To achieve this, the Council has five priorities for improving the quality of life through its services: delivering quality services to customers; delivering regeneration across the borough; keeping the borough clean and green; promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live and improving health and wellbeing across the borough. It also has a sixth priority of being a well managed council.

Services are improving. The Council has invested in better refuse collection and street cleaning services and the borough is becoming cleaner. Levels of litter and graffiti have fallen significantly, more waste is recycled and less waste is sent to landfill sites. The Council has attracted funding to Rossendale to help to improve poor housing and to support regeneration and its planning services have improved turnaround times to help development. The Council is working with partners to reduce crime, through CCTV and security measures for people's homes.

In spite of these improvements, local people's satisfaction with the Council and with its services is still lower than in many other areas. The Council has set up a new Communities team to work more closely with local people to understand their needs and to help them to become involved in local decision-making. It has improved its customer services, and people are very satisfied with the service they receive at the One Stop Shop.

Council services are helping disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The benefits service is much improved. The Council has reduced the time it takes to process claims and has worked with local banks to enable benefits to be paid into bank accounts. It has worked in partnership with Job Centre Plus to help single parents back into work. It is providing good support to people who are at risk of becoming homeless, in part through a mortgage rescue scheme. It has provided funding to help disabled people live in their own homes. The Council is updating its Older Person's Strategy to help its service respond better to the needs of people over 65.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for managing its performance. It is very clear about what it wants to achieve and it integrates its financial and service planning processes so that it can allocate resources to its priorities. Attention is now switching to minimising costs alongside further service improvements. It trains and manages its staff well to help them to deliver the objectives and improvements; sickness absence levels are low. It has clear arrangements for managing performance and produces performance reports which are open about what the Council has achieved and not achieved. It manages its risks well and it has introduced new ways of working and works well in partnership. But it does not yet have a full understanding of whether all its services achieve good value for money.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for its use of resources - using its staff and its money as effectively as possible. It has clear budget setting and financial monitoring arrangements and it has kept Council Tax rises below 3 per cent for the last three years while making almost £1 million in savings. Council Tax collections are very good. The Council consults local people on priorities and on its budget and it is now developing a better understanding of its costs. Risk management is embedded throughout the organisation but there is more to do to manage risks in partnerships. Some services, such as benefits, have been reviewed to improve value for money. Further reviews of other services areas are planned or underway.

## About Rossendale Borough Council

Rossendale lies in the south east of the county of Lancashire, close to the Manchester conurbation. The towns of Bacup, Rawtenstall and Haslingden lie along the valley of the River Irwell, surrounded by moorlands and villages. The area is rich in industrial heritage and a quarter of the jobs in the borough are still in manufacturing. Good transport links provide easy access to Manchester and to the rest of the county. The borough has a population of about 66,000 which is slowly increasing. About 3,000 residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

There are marked differences of prosperity and deprivation within the borough. Unemployment is about the same as the national average but wage levels are well below regional and national levels. Half of the working

population travels out of the borough to work, mainly in Greater Manchester, where wages are much higher. One fifth of the borough suffers poor health, in the worst 10 per cent in the country. Although there has been a large decrease in the early death rate from heart disease and stroke, this is still significantly higher than national averages. Six areas of the borough rank among the 25 per cent most deprived nationally. Some parts of the borough have poor housing.

Rossendale Borough Council has 36 councillors: 21 Conservatives, 11 Labour, three Liberal-Democrats and one Community First. It is one of 11 district councils in Lancashire, which is a two-tier local authority area. The County Council and the district councils provide different services and work in partnership with each other and with private and voluntary organisations to improve the quality of life in the area. Rossendale Borough Council transferred its housing stock to a housing association, Green Vale Homes, in 2006.

The Local Strategic Partnership and the Council share a vision for the district: "By 2018, Rossendale will have strong communities with an enhanced environment and heritage. It will be an attractive place to live, where tourists visit and employers invest."

The Council has six priorities:

Delivering quality services to our customers

Delivering regeneration across the borough

Keeping our borough clean and green

Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live

Improving health and wellbeing across the borough

A well managed council

## Organisational assessment

In this section we consider how the organisation is performing against its priorities.

### Delivering quality services to our customers

The Council has had some success in delivering this priority. 98 per cent of the 40,000 people who visited the One Stop Shop in 2008/09 were satisfied with the service they received there, and benefit claims are being processed faster. However, people's satisfaction with some other Council services is not as good as regional averages, including for refuse collection and recycling and for parks and open spaces. The Council has a very clear set of customer service standards and is monitoring its performance on these. In 2008/09 Council staff answered over 90 per cent of calls within 20 seconds and waiting times at the One Stop Shop fell to an average of 10 minutes.

## Delivering regeneration across the borough

Housing and homelessness services are included in this priority and the Council has made improvements in these. Although there are relatively more people who are homeless than in many other places, there has been a 50 per cent reduction and the number of people in temporary accommodation has dropped by nearly two thirds. £9.9 million is being invested in improving poorer housing through the Government's Housing Market Renewal initiative. The Council is providing financial help to disabled and vulnerable people to enable them to live in their own homes: it has provided 88 Disabled Facilities Grants and helped Green Vale Homes to adapt 35 properties. However, against the background of the economic downturn, the Council is not meeting its targets for more affordable housing. It is hopeful that if two major development schemes proceed as planned next year, targets will be met. There is also more to do to encourage private landlords to improve homes available for rent.

The Council has worked with partners to respond to the impact of the recession. It leads a multi-agency action group which has developed a mortgage rescue service, helping 14 households avoid eviction.

The Council is supporting the developments by supporting new developments. Its planning services have improved their performance and it has attracted funding from North West Development Agency to support the development of a £7 million business village in Rising Bridge.

## Keeping our borough clean and green

Refuse collection and recycling have improved. The Council is beating its own targets although performance is still below average when compared to other district councils. Residual housing waste has fallen and the amount of household waste which is recycled has increased to 28.5 per cent. But local people are less satisfied with these services than in other areas of the North West. In 2008, 64.7 per cent of Rossendale residents were satisfied with doorstep recycling compared to 69.4 per cent regionally, and only 67.2 per cent were satisfied with refuse collection compared to 76.1 per cent regionally. They are more satisfied than the North West average with recycling centres.

The Council has improved its street cleaning services. It has significantly reduced the levels of litter, fly-posting and graffiti and in 2008/09 removed all abandoned vehicles quickly. But less than half of the local population (47.6 per cent) are satisfied with the cleanliness of streets, compared to 52.4 per cent for the region. The Council has introduced the 'Pride in Rossendale' project to help improve satisfaction with the local area, in partnership with the County Council, the police, the Groundwork Trust and local people. 90 new street litterbins have already been installed and the Council has led four 'community clean-ups'.

## Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live

Local people's satisfaction with the area has increased. In 2008 72 per cent of local people thought that the borough is a good place to live, compared with 64 per cent in 2006. However, this is lower satisfaction than in most districts in

the country and fewer people than in most places feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together. The Council is promoting local events, including the annual Rossendale Alive festival which included the food festival and Mela and attracted over 5000 people, to try to improve residents' perceptions of Rossendale.

Older people (over 65) are less satisfied with the area: 76.1 per cent are happy with their home and neighbourhood, compared with the regional average of 82.5 per cent. The Council is working with partners to renew its Older Persons Strategy and action plan to improve services for older people and better meet their needs.

The Council includes crime reduction in this priority. Most categories of crime reduced in 2008/09. The Council's efforts have contributed to this reduction and it is helping to tackle increases in theft through increased CCTV cameras and security upgrades for 65 properties.

## Improving health and wellbeing across the borough

Local satisfaction with health services is lower than the regional averages and fewer adults than in most places take part in sport. The Council is working with health agencies to develop a new facility in Rawtenstall to improve people's access to health services. In 2008/09 it delivered a four week campaign in local markets to promote healthy eating and healthy living and it held a Streetwise event attended by 700 young people which included information on sensible approaches to alcohol.

## A well managed council

The Council has focused on improving the quality of its services during recent years. The transfer of the Council's housing stock to a housing association has brought £40 million investment to improve these homes. At the same time it has kept Council Tax rises below 3 per cent for the last three years and it has achieved almost £1 million in savings. It improved its ICT service while saving money and it is now developing a better understanding of its costs. It does well in collecting business rates but it has more to do to pay invoices to its suppliers on time: in 2008/09 it paid 95.5 per cent of these within 30 days against its target of 97.5 per cent. Council tax collection levels are very good compared to neighbouring councils and been maintained despite the economic downturn.

The Council is very clear about what it wants to achieve and integrates its financial and service planning processes so that it can allocate resources to its priorities. Budget setting and financial monitoring arrangements are in place. The Council trains and manages its staff well to help them to deliver objectives and improvements. Sickness absence is among the lowest in the country. The Council has clear arrangements for managing performance and produces performance reports which are open about what the Council has achieved and not achieved. It manages its risks well and works well in partnership, but risk management is not complete for partnerships. The Council works with neighbouring councils to deliver some services but has more to do to examine costs and develop business cases, across the full range

of service delivery.

The Council engages with local people well and supports vulnerable people through a range of services and initiatives. It has set up a new Communities team and introduced 'community impact assessments' for its services. The Communities team focuses on four areas in the district, encouraging local residents to get involved in decision-making around local issues.

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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