

Kettering Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



for an independent overview
of local public services

Kettering Borough Council

Overall, Kettering Borough 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

Kettering Borough Council performs adequately. It has invested a significant amount of time creating a culture, inside the Council, which places the needs of local people first. This has led to improvements, especially in areas that have been identified as important. There are good arrangements to help services get better. Regular 'performance clinics' help some services improve; the Council reduced the time it takes to re-let a council house. It used to take 44 days but now takes 32 days. However, improvement is not consistent across the range of services the Council provides, and there remain significant variations in quality across the Borough. Of the 70 indicators the Council tracks, it improved on 53 per cent, 21 per cent remained at the or about the same level, and 26 per cent got worse.

Kettering Borough Council achieved 2 out of 4 its managing performance assessment. The Council looks after the needs of local people. The customer service centres include a wide range of partners. In the main office there are 14 other organisations all available in one location. Benefit applications are dealt with quicker. The 'ten-day deal' promises to process applications presented with all supporting evidence within ten days. It is doing this in less than five days. But the overall time taken to decide applications, although five days quicker than last year, was longer than many councils, although speed has continued to increase. Most crime has dropped, and people have less concern about drugs, alcohol and anti-social behaviour than other areas in the region. Simple, yet effective, changes that improve efficiency and make services easier to use, have been made because staff and local people are involved in making decisions. Adding wheels to recycling boxes, and inviting Revenues and Customs in the customer service centre were both ideas from staff and local people. Council housing is well-maintained and four out of five

tenants are happy with the service the Council provides as their landlord.

However, people are less satisfied with the Borough Council than most other councils. Although three-quarters of local people are satisfied with the Borough as a place to live, this is still ten per cent lower than average for England. Satisfaction varies across the Borough with some areas having only half the people being satisfied with the area they live in. Less than half of local people are satisfied with how clean the area is kept, even though only two per cent of land fails to meet nationally acceptable standards. The Council has responded to these findings by examining possible reasons and has put a plan in place to tackle the issues it finds, which includes a new borough-wide newsletter to all residents.

Kettering Borough Council achieved 2 out of 4 for its use of resources. It reviews its plans each year and ensures it spends money on its priorities, and that the amount of money it keeps in reserve is adequate. The Council has introduced new ways of working such as the 'ten day deal', and has looked at high costs services such as recycling, and made the decision to continue to support priority services. It has not yet considered, in depth, the cost of a service compared to the quality, nor taken into account the satisfaction of local people. Overall performance remains mixed, with some areas providing good service, others poorer and some improving, such as revenues and benefits.

About Kettering Borough Council

Kettering is a district in North Northamptonshire in the East Midlands. The Borough consists of the principal town of Kettering, where six out of ten local people live. There are three smaller towns, where one-quarter of local people live and some 20 villages, mostly with small populations in the surrounding countryside. The district lies within a key growth area identified by the government. The population is around 89,500 and shows a slightly higher child population when compared with national averages. Population growth in the next ten to 20 years is well above average. Most of the population are of white ethnic backgrounds, and there is also a notable community of Indian ethnicity.

Kettering is a fairly well-off area and has become more well-off in recent years. Most jobs are in manufacturing, distribution and light engineering as well as the public sector. However, the amount people earning and level of qualification they have are lower than average. Typical house prices are below average, but vary across the Borough. The health of people in Kettering is generally better than the England average, although there are inequalities within Kettering by gender, deprivation and ethnicity.

Kettering Borough Council has 36 councillors. The Conservatives are in charge with 28 councillors. People living in Kettering Borough are represented by Kettering Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council.

Kettering Borough Council has four key commitments;

Build and deliver sustainable communities

Excellent customer services

A greener and cleaner environment

Community and rural issues

These are supported by 12 priorities.

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Overall, of the 70 indicators the Council track, it improved 53 per cent; 21 per cent remained at the or about the same level, and 26 per cent got worse.

Community and Rural Issues

The Council and its partners have had mixed success on crime and anti-social behaviour. Most types of crime have reduced, but burglary and thefts have increased. One in five people think that drugs are a problem and one in four think that people being drunk is a problem in the Borough. Both are lower than the average in the East Midlands. The Council and its partners completed several projects to help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. This includes activities for young people to keep them out of trouble, especially where it is most needed. A recent survey showed that 16 per cent of local people think that anti-social behaviour is a problem in their neighbourhood - well below the regional average of 21 per cent.

The Council has achieved Level 2 of the Local Government Equalities Scheme. It has started to assess services and how it can deliver them differently to make them easier to use. There are some good examples - such as in recycling where wheels have been added to bins. This has made the scheme easier to use for many people, reduced costs for the Council and increased the amount recycled. The Council reckons that, under the new scheme, it will be at 'achieving' level.

People are, broadly, less satisfied with living in Kettering borough than many other areas of England. Only one-third of local people are satisfied with how the Council runs, which is 10 per cent below the regional average. Three-quarters of local people are satisfied with the Borough as a place to live, but this is still lower than the national average. Both levels of satisfaction vary across the Borough. One ward has a 95 per cent satisfaction with the area, as a place to live, yet in another ward only half the people living there are satisfied with the area. One ward has 57 per cent of local people happy with the Council while another has just one in five local people satisfied. The Council has started to look at these results and has developed plans to tackle the issues identified. One immediate plan has been to improve how the Council communicates with local people, including a new newsletter and improving the standard of letters sent from the Council.

Cleaner and greener environment

The Council increased how much household waste it recycled, up from 46 per cent to 47 per cent. This means the Council is now recycling almost as much

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waste as it is sending to landfill. It has made recycling easier for many people by offering wheels on the recycling boxes - this means that more people are able to take part in the service, and the costs have dropped as less people are asking for help. Overall, this simple initiative improved recycling rates and reduced costs - improving value for money.

The Borough continues to be cleaned effectively. Just two per cent of relevant land was not of acceptable cleanliness. But local people are still not happy; less than half are satisfied with how clean their neighbourhood is. The Council is reviewing expectations, but can point to some successful initiatives. Lay-bys are cleaner, especially on main roads, because the Council is putting more bins in that are easier to see and use. The cost of keeping them clean has also dropped.

Several projects help improve the environment. Overall, the Council helped reduce carbon dioxide use by 4.6 per cent over the year. It has used simple, but effective, techniques in the Council's own buildings, such as switching off lights. It has run an innovative pilot scheme, with an electricity company, to encourage 500 homes to use less electricity. Each household had targets and was rewarded with money and vouchers if they reduced electricity use by the targets. The Council is reviewing the success of the scheme before deciding whether it should extend it.

Sustainable Communities

The Council is making good progress towards its sustainable communities priority. The first phase of the market place is complete providing a new focus for the town centre. The land is being cleared for the second phase. This forms part of a range of sixteen projects - known as Suite 16 - which are planned, over a five year period, to regenerate the town centre. Chesham House, a prominent historic building in the town, was renovated. The University of Northampton uses it to support new businesses in the area - 11 starter businesses are located there and other businesses can get free business and legal advice.

The Borough has exceeded national targets for the number of new homes that have been built and, despite the economic downturn, land available for development exceeded the government's need for a five-year supply. In 2008/09, 243 affordable homes were built, an increase from the previous year's 116. The speed of deciding planning applications has improved. All planning applications are dealt with on time - the Council deals with planning applications from households faster than most other councils, and the number of people not happy with the planning decision made has dropped.

Council houses are of decent quality and well insulated. Four out of five tenants are happy with the services the Council provides as their landlord. But it has taken the Council too long to make repairs, and to re-let a house when one tenant moves out. The Council has started to take action on both these issues - showing that it can respond when things go wrong. Repairs completed on time has increased to 96 per cent and the time to re-let homes after the previous tenant leaves has dropped from 44 days and is currently 32 days. Both issues are checked monthly by the Council through its performance management system and performance clinics. Houses are now re-let through the Council's Choice Based Letting system, which also includes homes from

other registered social landlords and some private landlords as well.

The Council and its partners are lessening the impact of the economic downturn on the borough. Partners held a 'Kettering Summit' at the end of 2008, to help people cope with the downturn. 35 partners organisations attended, and the Council and partners reviewed the summit and identified actions that could help further. For example, to process benefit applications quicker, the Council changed how it works. It introduced 'the ten day deal', moved staff to the customer services centre so benefit applications could continue to be processed, and has worked with partner to organise two job fairs. The Council and its partners continue to review what they can do to support people in the borough.

Excellent customer services

Excellent customer services are important to the Council and local people. The immediate impact of the downturn, and the increased number of people contacting the Council, meant that it took longer for the Council to answer queries. However, the Council has continued to provide a range of services from its customer services centre. These are in all the main towns of the Borough, and run as a partnership. In the main office in Kettering, there are 14 other organisations involved, including the fire service, police, Citizens Advice Bureau and Revenues and Customs. This all helps local people gain the advice and information they need. This centre has recently been selected as a 'Trailblazer' for other councils and organisations to learn from. The Council involved local people in decision making.

The Council involves staff at all levels, and local people, in identifying how services should be arranged and delivered. The Chief Executive is visible and encourages staff to be innovative and develop ideas. All staff are involved in reshaping the Council as it gears up to responding to the downturn in the economy and the impact that it has on the Council.

The Council's performance management system includes benchmarking against similar councils. This helps the Council identify areas which perform better, and services where the Council's performance is poorer compared with other councils. Regular performance clinics mean that issues are identified quickly and the Council can start to take action to improve services. This is important because the Council needs to remain focussed on services and improving the quality of life for local people.

To help improve the quality of life, and improve processing benefits, the Council introduced 'the ten day deal'. It promised to process correctly presented benefits claims within ten days. Since September 2008, over 570 applications have been presented under the ten day deal, and the average time to process these applications is less than five days. The ten day deal forms part of a three-year improvement plan for processing benefits - as identified in the Council's corporate plan. In November 2008, the Council introduced Voice Risk Analysis and has processed over 350 applications so far using this technology. Overall speed and accuracy of processing benefits claims has improved, despite more people applying - the workload has increased by 20 per cent. The total time to process all claims has reduced by five days, to 26 days for 2008/09 and has continued to improve - averaging 20 days for the period April - September 2009. Last year the Council recorded

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that all claims were processed accurately. This all helps reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for people when they are vulnerable.

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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

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