

Sunderland

Area Assessment

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oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

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Sunderland at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Sunderland. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from

No green flags have been identified for Sunderland

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

No red flags have been identified for Sunderland

The local area

Sunderland is the largest city in the North East of England with a population of some 280,500. The BME population is mainly based in the centre of Sunderland and is about 3 per cent of the population. As with many cities, Sunderland has an ageing population. More people are moving out of the City than into it and the population is set to continue to fall by a small amount over the next 20 years.

Sunderland comprises a city centre based around the mouth of the River Wear but also includes the former new town of Washington and the two former coal-mining towns of Hetton and Houghton. It has an attractive coastline, a port, a University and a large amount of open countryside with many parks and nature reserves. Two national highways, the A19 and the A1 (M) run through Sunderland, and it has a direct rail connection to London. The Tyne and Wear Metro rail system and local rail services provide access to international airports - Newcastle and Tees Valley / Durham.

The decline in traditional heavy industries on which the City's economy was founded left behind a legacy of economic uncertainty and social exclusion. The City has recovered to some extent, largely by developing automotive industries and contact centres infrastructure and through reclaiming land for new uses. It is now seeking to develop a national and international profile in new industries and technologies like Information Technology, computing and

sustainable energy. Sunderland is a relatively deprived area, although things have improved. In 2004 it was the 22nd most deprived area in England, and in 2007 this had improved to the 35th most deprived (out of 354).

The main issues for the area relate to health inequalities, poor life expectancy, low incomes, matching skills to employment opportunities and the migration of young people out of the area leaving an older population.

The next section tells you how Sunderland's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

How is Sunderland doing?

Prosperous City

Sunderland has had one of the highest employment growth rates in the country. There is a good record of attracting new businesses and investment to the city. This is likely to continue, helped by an Economic Masterplan, providing a comprehensive and integrated regeneration strategy for the City, due for completion early 2010. Each year around 300 new businesses start in or move to the city, increasing the types of businesses and giving a wider range of jobs. However, Sunderland has the fifth lowest wage level of UK cities. The local response to the recession is sustaining and creating jobs. However, the recession presents a major risk to the pace of delivery of Sunderland's plans to provide more local homes.

Learning City

The Sunderland Learning Partnership is helping to improve skills in the city. Clear plans are in place for it to continue to deliver improved outcomes. The shared sixth form model is an effective way of helping children and young people to take part in education and learning. Sunderland College's 'Business Solutions' helps employers by delivering training in the workplace to improve employee skills. The University works with businesses operating in the area, particularly to assist development of new business ideas. However, one in eight of young people in Sunderland are not in employment, education or training. This is well above national and local averages and a top priority for the area. Results at age 11 are now in line with the national figure and 43 per cent of young people are achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths. There are a good range of opportunities for adults to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

Healthy City

Health and deprivation in Sunderland are worse than national averages. There is, though, a good understanding of the health, social care and wellbeing needs of the population. Easier access to treatment is reducing some health inequalities and this is likely to continue. However, not all plans are completed, limiting the opportunity for partners to contribute to improvement. On average, Sunderland residents die younger than in the rest of the country.

Deaths from smoking, and early deaths from cancer, heart disease and stroke are all worse than national averages. Action to improve health has been underway for a number of years, and overall death rates in the last 10 years have reduced. However, some key targets are not being met, such as reducing death rates for men to nearer the national average; the teenage pregnancy rate; and smoking rates, particularly smoking during pregnancy. Access to primary health care at a local level is easier and care services for adults are good.

Safe City

Overall crime is lower in Sunderland than similar areas in England and Wales, continues to fall and fear of crime is reducing. There are positive outcomes from a range of targeted work including drug treatment programmes, a safer homes programme improving quality of life, youth engagement projects and parenting initiatives. Strong partnership working and good use of intelligence result in clear plans which should ensure that these improvements continue. In 2008/09 recorded crime was down three per cent from the previous year and there have been reductions in every main recorded crime activity.

Attractive and Inclusive City

Sunderland's local environment is currently ranked joint third best of the UK's 20 largest cities. Sunderland's streets and green space are well maintained. Improvement is likely to continue through plans to identify a network of green corridors to increase opportunities for sport and leisure activities and plans for a 'Legible City' to help people enjoy the City and find their way around. Social housing within the City is in a good condition. However, availability of affordable housing is a significant issue for Sunderland and reducing homelessness is a top priority for Sunderland. Transport links are good, both by public transport and by road. But the 2008 Place Survey identified a lack of cohesion across different communities.

About Sunderland

A recent survey shows that in Sunderland 77 per cent of people are satisfied with their immediate local area as a place to live. This is broadly the same as the average for similar areas and lower than the national average of 81 per cent.

Sunderland is the largest city in the North East of England with a population of some 280,500. The BME population is mainly based in the centre of Sunderland and is about 3 per cent of the population. As with many cities, Sunderland has an ageing population. More people are moving out of the City than into it and the population is set to continue to fall by a small amount over the next 20 years.

Sunderland is very diverse urban area. It comprises a city centre based around the mouth of the River Wear but also includes the former new town of Washington and the two former coal-mining towns of Hetton and Houghton. It has an attractive coastline, a port, a University, a sub-regional shopping

centre, a regional theatre and a large amount of open countryside with many parks and nature reserves. Two national highways, the A19 and the A1 (M) run through Sunderland, and it has a direct rail connection to London. The Tyne and Wear Metro rail system and local rail services provide access to international airports - Newcastle and Tees Valley / Durham.

The decline in traditional heavy industries on which the City's economy was founded left behind a legacy of economic uncertainty and social exclusion that remains a lasting challenge. The City has recovered to some extent, largely by developing automotive industries and contact centres and through reclaiming land for new uses. It is now seeking to develop a national and international profile in new industries and technologies like Information Technology, computing, and sustainable energy.

Sunderland is a relatively deprived area, although things have improved. In 2004 it was the 22nd most deprived area in England, and in 2007 this had improved to the 35th most deprived (out of 354).

Whilst progress has been made in regenerating the City, there are still many issues to overcome as consequence of the economic and social changes the City is undergoing. The Sunderland Partnership has determined the following key priorities for the City:

- Prosperous City
- Healthy City
- Safe City
- Learning City
- Attractive and Inclusive City

Partners have also agreed priority targets with central government within a citywide Local Area Agreement (LAA) and a sub-regional Multi Area Agreement (MAA). The main issues for the area relate to health inequalities, poor life expectancy, low incomes, matching skills to employment opportunities, and the migration of young people out of the area leaving an older population.

How well do priorities for Sunderland express community needs and aspirations?

The Sunderland Community Strategy sets out a clear long term vision for the City in the year 2025. This is based on a good understanding of needs and priorities of residents. Its five aims describe ambitions for a City that is Prosperous; a Learning City; Healthy; Safe; and Attractive & Inclusive. What is important for local people is captured in a series of local priorities. These are then written into Local Area Plans, and into the Sunderland Partnership's five Delivery Plans for each of their strategic ambitions. These plans reflect the needs of communities in Sunderland and minority groups. The understanding

of those who are difficult to reach is improving through more co-ordinated contact by partners. Through plans for children and young people it is clear that every child matters in Sunderland

There is a good understanding of the inequalities and diversity of local communities and their needs for services over the longer term. A number of ways have been used to talk to local residents, including a resident's annual survey, specific discussions with black and minority ethnic and other minority groups, and a health needs assessment which particularly looked at minority groups and young people's needs. As a result of this conversation, the plans of the Council and partnership pick up the differing needs of local people, and are seeking to reduce the differences in health, jobs, income and crime levels between local areas.

There is a good approach to community engagement with an improving approach to jointly undertaken consultation. The Sunderland Partnership Consultation Group now co-ordinates major engagement by partners. There are seven Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs), represented on the Creating Inclusive Communities (CIC) Group, to raise issues of concern for different groups of people with particular needs. The citizens' panel considers priorities and has influenced strategy and budget decisions. However, despite these efforts to talk to, and understand, local residents, surveys show that they do not feel fully involved in decision making. A low number of local people think they have been involved in decisions - 8 per cent compared to 14 per cent nationally. Only 1 in 4 people think they can influence decisions (26 per cent compared to 29 per cent nationally). Yet a below average proportion of people would like to be more involved in local decisions - 24 per cent compared to 27 per cent nationally.

Capacity within the Sunderland Partnership is generally good and being improved through the Community Leadership Programme. The focus of the Programme is 'making Sunderland work better', stressing the importance of trust, satisfaction and feedback. The Programme has spread from an initial focus on enhancing the role of councillors to the Sunderland Partnership as a whole and its role in delivering the Sunderland Strategy.

It has proved difficult for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups to contribute significantly to the decision making of the Council and the Partnership. This is partly because most VCS groups are small organisations who do not have enough people to attend lots of meetings. The Partnership is trying to improve this by using the Sunderland Community Network (SCN), which represents 80 to 90 local groups, to develop plans that will help improve the way groups can have their say. Representation on the Sunderland Partnership's Delivery Partnerships from the VCS is being sought. In addition, the Council is seeking Community Network representation on Area Committees to improve opportunities for smaller VCS organisations to engage in area decision making. Development of five Area VCS Networks, aims to provide the voice for the Community Network at a local level.

Prosperous City

Sunderland has had one of the highest employment growth rates in the country. There is a good record of attracting new businesses and investment to the City. This is likely to continue, helped by an Economic Masterplan that

will provide a comprehensive and integrated plan for the regeneration of the City, due for completion early in 2010.

In the last 10 years 13,900 jobs have been created in Sunderland. This has been possible due to success in creating new jobs in businesses such as car manufacture, contact centres and new technology. Each year around 300 new businesses start in or move to the City, increasing the types of businesses and giving a wider range of jobs. However, Sunderland still has the fifth lowest wage level of UK cities.

The local response to the recession is sustaining and creating jobs. The increase in unemployment in the City arising from the economic downturn has reversed with a fall of 667 people in the three months from June 2009. This compares to the national total continuing to increase. There is significant investment to increase jobs, including £27 million through the Working Neighbourhood Fund to help more people into work, particularly those who are long term unemployed and living in the most deprived neighbourhoods. The Council's Job Linkage initiative is providing, with the voluntary sector and Job Centre Plus, a comprehensive neighbourhood service at 13 local centres. It provides advice and support to people who are looking for work.

The Rainton Bridge Business Park continues to attract major companies, including the relocation of 900 power company jobs. The development of the new Turbine Park Business Park in Washington started in 2009. When complete the Park will create up to 4,000 jobs. The Council and partners are also talking more to key employers during the recession, to ensure they can help safeguard existing jobs.

A major initiative 'Sunderland Software City' (SSC) sees Sunderland emerging as a regional centre for software development industries. The Software City programme is a five year programme, started in 2009, to provide the infrastructure to create and grow software businesses and attract investment. An initial centre has been established at Rainton Bridge and there is £2.9million for the University's SSC education and innovation project to provide support, facilities and services for people wishing to start software businesses.

In the last year regeneration projects have brought almost 1,500 new jobs to Sunderland. Significant projects delivered include the Sunderland Aquatic Centre in Stadium Village providing the only Olympic size pool in the region, and the business and arts centre ThePlace in Sunnyside. Over £113million of private investment has rejuvenated the Sunnyside part of the City, attracting new businesses, homes and leisure facilities. The Council is now tackling the challenge of more effectively integrating these regeneration projects into a refurbished city centre, and green areas such as Mowbray Park and Sunnyside Gardens. People have not seen as much change on major city centre sites as they might have liked, but there is recent positive progress towards developing the Vaux site and Holmeside Triangle in the city centre.

The recession presents a major risk to the pace of delivery of Sunderland's plans to provide more new homes that will encourage people to continue living locally. Despite the recession, the net (i.e. houses built less houses demolished) number of homes created in 2008/09 did increase to 299 from 186 in 2007/08. Large numbers of newly built houses are required over the next few years to meet demand and replace the high numbers of properties

demolished since 2004. The Council and partners have begun to address these problems, and plans have been developed for identified areas for development. This includes supporting Gentoo to provide a range of housing over the next 18 months through £40 million funding from the Government's 'Kickstart' scheme.

Child poverty is reducing faster than in other areas, but remains high. Fifty one per cent of children in Sunderland are within the Government definition of 'poverty' compared to 44% in the North East and 42% in England. The Working Neighbourhoods Fund is a key part of the plan to move families out of poverty through increasing chances for getting jobs.

The five Councils in Tyne and Wear, with Durham and Northumberland County Councils, recognise that certain issues like better skills and transport are best dealt with together, rather than in separate local areas. There is progress to deliver government policy but still a need to tackle more local issues such as improving skills for local employment opportunities. This work has begun, with the Councils developing a joint understanding of skills needed. This helps individual Councils provide the right learning and employment support services to people in their area. Improved working together resulted in a successful Future Jobs Funds bid for all Tyne and Wear to increase skills and keep people in employment. Transport arrangements at City region level, and through a new Integrated Transport Authority (ITA), have yet to fully realise the benefits of changes in Transport legislation. An Economic Review, to be completed by 2010, will provide a clearer way forward for joint working on transport and skills. It will also provide a clearer picture of housing need linked to where people work and how people travel to work. We shall look next year at whether actions are delivering improvements.

There are strong international relationships to develop economic, educational and cultural links. The University leads on the International Strategy. Examples of good city partnerships include the recent China visit with the Council, industry and education strongly represented; twinning with Washington; and the annual Irish Festival built on the University's cultural festival. Events such as the annual International Airshow and the current football World Cup bid all help to raise the profile of Sunderland. Proposals for a new bridge across the Wear have also helped to promote the City.

Learning City

The Sunderland Learning Partnership is helping to improve skills in the City. Clear plans are in place for it to continue to deliver improved outcomes. The shared sixth form model is an effective way of helping children and young people to take part in education and learning. A new school at Washington, and three new academies opened in September 2009. Sunderland College's 'Business Solutions' helps employers by delivering training in the workplace to improve employee skills. The University works with businesses operating in the area, particularly to assist development of new business ideas.

One in eight young people in Sunderland are not in employment, education or training. This is well above national and local averages and a top priority for the area. A recent comprehensive needs analysis has identified the preferred

destination and qualifications for every young person in Sunderland not in employment, education or training. Targeted work with vulnerable groups including young people leaving care and young offenders has increased the number from these groups in employment, education or training to well above national averages. Good links between schools, colleges and employers are increasing the chances for young people to acquire skills. This includes, in 2008, two new 'Sunderland Futures' applied learning centres for 14 -16 young people to be trained with links to employers. There is also the opportunity for all 14 new diplomas and a wide range of courses provided by the sixth form colleges and Sunderland College to be studied. We shall look next year at whether these actions are reducing the numbers not in employment, education or training.

Eleven-year old children now achieve at a similar rate to the national average. However, at 70 per cent achieving Level 4 in both English and Maths Key Stage 2 at the end of primary school they remain 3 per cent below those of similar authorities. Results for 16-year old young people are also improving with 43 per cent of young people achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths. Achievement is now matching that of similar areas although still being about 4 per cent below national average figures.

There is good information, advice and guidance to enable young people to access relevant learning opportunities. More young people from low income backgrounds progress into higher education through a good range of 'Aim Higher' activities. Young people from minority ethnic groups do as well as others in getting employment, education and training.

Care leavers have good access to suitable accommodation and this enables them to engage in employment, education and training. Achievement of Level 2 qualifications - like GCSEs - by the time people are 19 years old matches the national figure. However, figures are below average for the achievement of Level 3 qualifications - like A levels. Sunderland uses a good range of schemes to encourage young people who are looked after into work.

Through the Family Learning, Literature and Numeracy (FLLN) Programmes, people are able to further develop their skills in literacy, numeracy and personal development. Help to all adults who take part in the Adult Learning Programme ranges from crèche facilities, childcare, providing equipment or software such as IT packages to help those with dyslexia. Sunderland College helps improve peoples' basic skills by a 'Test the City' programme, which has enabled more than 6,000 people to gain a Maths or English qualification and attracted 2,500 'Skills for life' enrolments per year.

Healthy City

Health and deprivation in Sunderland are worse than the national averages. But there is a good understanding of the health, social care and wellbeing needs of the population. Easier access to treatment is reducing some health inequalities and this is likely to continue. In March 2008, in recognition of good work, Sunderland City Council and partners were announced as a Beacon Authority for 'Reducing Health Inequalities'. However, not all plans are yet completed, limiting the opportunity for partners to help in improving health.

On average, Sunderland residents have shorter lives and die earlier than the country as a whole. Deaths from smoking and early deaths from cancer, heart disease and stroke are all worse than national averages. Action to improve health has been underway for a number of years, and overall death rates in the last 10 years have reduced. More is being done to encourage men in particular to have health checks. This includes a Health Programme pilot involving 1,000 staff at Sunderland and Gateshead councils, focussed on men in lower paid jobs. However, some key targets are not being met, such as reducing death rates for men to nearer the national average; reducing the teenage pregnancy rate; and smoking rates, particularly smoking during pregnancy. We shall look next year at the impact of programmes to improve health, reduce teenage pregnancy and reduce smoking and alcohol related issues.

Teenage pregnancy is not reducing significantly in Sunderland. In the last year the rate has increased to 57.3 per 1,000 females aged 15-17. Partners are taking co-ordinated action, targeted at specific areas and groups, including the expansion of the Healthy Schools Programme to Colleges.

There is increased effort to support people to stop smoking. In Sunderland 1,321 residents are on the 'quit smoking' programme, more than last year. Targeted work is aimed at routine and manual workers and the Healthy Schools and Smoke Free programmes help to reduce the number of young people starting to smoke. Increased action is also reducing the supply of cheap illegal tobacco and under-age sales. The Local Tobacco Alliance has reformed looking to identify how partners can contribute to the number of people quitting.

Death rates from alcohol related causes in Sunderland are higher than those for the North East as a whole. The number of people dying from chronic liver disease is increasing. Hospital treatment for alcohol-related conditions is a major issue. Alcohol harm-related hospital admissions increased to 2,379 per 100,000 of population in 2008. There is significant investment to tackle alcohol issues in Sunderland, through the Alcohol Strategy.

Access to local primary health care is easier. There is now a network of primary care centres such as the Bunny Hill Centre. There are more local 'weight management' services and 74 per cent of Sunderland GP Practices signed up to the delivery of vascular checks for patients in their practices. The City Council and Teaching Primary Care Trust have created a comprehensive city-wide Wellness Service to improve lifestyles and encourage physical activity. The Community Wellness Programme allows easier access to facilities and equipment at a local level. Exercise Referral and Weight management programmes are now available in local neighbourhoods. Between April 2007 and March 2008 there were more than 300,000 attendances at Wellness Centres by people over the age of 16 - twice the target number. However, the impact on improved health is not yet clear.

It is easier to take part in sport and leisure activities. There are a number of city programmes and projects which involve various partners and are designed to allow sport and leisure in local neighbourhoods.

Provision for children's health is mixed. Obesity in children of primary school age (11-year olds) in 2008/09 was 21 per cent in Sunderland compared to the national average of 18 per cent. The Council, schools and other partners are

tackling obesity levels through the Healthy Schools Programme. During the past two years, 99 schools and 30,000 children have been involved in the Sunderland Food in Schools Programme, which focuses on teaching youngsters the benefits of healthy eating and how to prepare and cook simple balanced meals. There are a good number of children taking school lunches in primary schools. Services to help the mental health of children and young people are good.

Care services for adults are good. They have improved significantly in recent years to provide more support to those living in their own homes and in preparation for an increasingly older population. For example, the Telecare service has expanded with an alarm response time of 20 minutes and a wider range of Tele-care enabled equipment including support for older people with complex conditions. The first 40 of 170 Extra Care units over the next two years opened in Silksworth in March 2009. This is a form of sheltered accommodation with personal care. Around average 83 per cent of people aged 65 or over are satisfied with both their home and their neighbourhood and 36 per cent think older people get the help and support they need (above average). Patient surveys for the Primary Care Trust and the Mental Health Trust are also positive about the services provided.

Safe City

Overall crime in Sunderland is lower than similar areas in England and Wales and the gap between actual crime rates and perceptions of crime is now closing. There are positive outcomes from a range of targeted work including drug treatment programmes, a safer homes programme improving security for victims of crime, youth engagement projects and parenting initiatives. Strong partnership working and good use of intelligence for clear plans should ensure that these improvements continue.

In 2008/09 recorded crime was down three per cent from the previous year. There have been reductions in every main recorded crime activity. Overall crime, racially or religiously aggravated crime, robbery, vehicle crime, violent crime, sexual offences and criminal damage are all below average when compared to similar areas. Sunderland had the lowest level of serious acquisitive crime - which means burglaries, theft, robbery and car crime - compared to fifteen similar areas.

People are feeling safer in Sunderland. The partnership works hard to tell people how it is making the City safer. Twenty-five plasma TV screens in community venues around the City are used to provide information to residents. Eighty-one per cent of residents generally feel safe in Sunderland. A 2008 survey shows reductions in perception of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB), drink and drug related behaviour, though all are still above average. Perceptions of ASB as a problem have fallen from 51 per cent in 2003 to 23 per cent in 2008, though this is above national and North East averages and the highest of the five Tyne & Wear areas.

Re-offending by young people in Sunderland is lower than similar areas. Youth crime in Sunderland has fallen by 6 per cent in the last year. There has also been a reduction of 18.3 per cent in the rate of re-offences when comparing offending over a 12 month period for young people in 2008 compared to 2005. The Youth Offending Service works well and there are a number of

schemes that provide good support and as a result fewer young people receive a custodial sentence. This includes 120 places on the Fire and Rescue Service Phoenix Project helping young people back into employment. Young offenders in employment, education or training increased from 76 per cent in 2004 to 91 per cent in 2009, well above the national average. In recognition of good work Sunderland City Council and partners were announced as a Beacon Authority for 'Reducing Re-offending' in March 2008.

The Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) has, since Jan 2005, seen an overall reduction in drug related re-offending. In the last year there was a 3 per cent reduction. There are however issues of substance misuse by young people. Sunderland has seen a decrease in Class A drug use by young people but an increase in alcohol and cannabis use. These two account for 93 per cent of those in treatment. The use of neutral venues and times convenient to young people has made it easier for treatment services to get in touch with young people with drug problems.

Safe City initiatives improve people's quality of life by reducing crime and the fear of crime. The Safer Homes Initiative offers improved home security to victims and those at high risk of house burglary, hate crime and domestic violence. In Hendon, investment resulted in a significant reduction in crime and fear of crime through actions such as providing a better environment including better street lights. There is targeted work in communities experiencing high levels of crime such as 'Not in My Neighbourhood Week' and Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPS) addressing local problems.

Sunderland's balanced approach to tackling Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) through prevention, early intervention, enforcement and support has resulted in improved behaviour and attendance in schools and strengthening communities. For example, a successful 'Youth Village' pilot with 856 young people attending events resulted in a substantial reduction in ASB and a 34 per cent reduction in crime in the pilot area. These types of initiatives have contributed towards the 28 per cent improvement in perceptions of ASB since 2003.

Levels of domestic violence in the City remain high, but are reducing. There is a 24 hour helpline and specialist support workers available and the first domestic violence perpetrators hostel is due to open shortly and will be the first of its kind nationally. In the meantime, hostel staff have been working on an outreach basis. A specialist domestic violence court was introduced in October 2008. The court sits every Tuesday afternoon with trained magistrates presiding over cases. As well as successful prosecutions the court aims to reduce repeat victimisation.

Safeguarding children is a high priority in the area. Families receive timely support to prevent young people entering the care system. When referrals are made to social care, assessments are conducted promptly. However, recent data indicates a higher number of children have been subject to a second child protection plan and there are also some difficulties in completing assessments on time. Looked after children are in stable placements and their reviews are held within the required timescale. Most are placed close to their families and friends.

Alcohol related crime rates are higher than the North East average but lower than England. Sunderland is estimated to be the eighth worst area in England

for binge drinking. Initiatives to reduce alcohol related crime include work with Licensees to use polycarbonate 'glasses' and deployment of security staff to reduce taxi rank assaults. There is a new Alcohol Strategy being developed by the Safer Sunderland Partnership and significant NHS investment in alcohol treatment services. This includes Alcohol Treatment programmes targeted towards violent offenders with alcohol misuse issues. Since starting, in July 2009, 24 individuals have started the programme.

Attractive and Inclusive City

Sunderland's local environment is currently ranked joint third best of the UK's 20 largest cities. Sunderland's streets and green space are well maintained. Improvement is likely to continue through plans to identify a network of green corridors to increase opportunities for sport and leisure activities and for 'Legible City' to improve information and help people enjoy the City and find their way around.

Sunderland is clean and well kept with good levels of open green space including well maintained parks. Roker Beach was again awarded a 'Blue Flag' for cleanliness in 2009. However, people have mixed views about the areas they live in. Overall satisfaction with the local area is up to 76.8 per cent and satisfaction with cleanliness improved to 54.4 per cent in 2008 surveys, but both these figures remain slightly below average. Parks and open spaces satisfaction - at 63.3 per cent - is in line with the North East average, although below the national average.

There is good work in Sunderland to reduce partners' impact on the environment. There are positive comparisons with other areas regarding the consumption of natural resources. Sunderland has the 8th lowest per capita consumption of natural resources of all UK cities. Sunderland Council is recognised by the Carbon Trust as a national leader in managing carbon emissions. This coupled with work on climate change, recently won a national Sustainable Communities Award 2009 for 'Tackling Climate Change'. Waste going to landfill sites has reduced and the Joint Waste Partnership between Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead is to use new waste handling facilities to further reduce waste to landfill.

Improvements to cultural and leisure facilities are increasing usage and satisfaction. Examples of current developments include the Barnes Park regeneration and two new pools at Hetton and Silksworth. In the first three months of the 'Letsgo Card' it provided the opportunity for over 1,500 young people from low income families to attend a range of activities such as sport, music, cinema and dance. Satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities, libraries, museum/galleries and theatres/concert halls are all above national and North East averages. There are plans to build on the success of concerts held at the Stadium of Light during 2009 and Sunderland has bid to be a World Cup Host City in 2018.

Social housing within the City is in a good condition. 99.4% of properties owned by registered social landlords in the area meet the government's Decent Homes Standard. Tenants and their families live in dwellings that are of a good standard with consequent benefits to their health and well being.

Availability of affordable housing is a significant issue for Sunderland. During 2008/09 230 affordable new homes have been provided. The 299 additional homes built during 2008/09 is an improvement on the previous year's figure of 186 additional homes. The Council and partners have begun to address these problems, and plans have been developed for identified areas for development. This includes supporting Gentoo to provide a range of housing over the next 18 months through £40 million funding from the Government's 'Kickstart' scheme.

Reducing homelessness is a top priority for Sunderland. There is a particular focus on prevention and looking to reduce the numbers of people who are repeatedly homeless. This is decreasing through more support including increased home visits. The number of homeless has reduced from 634 down to 217 in 2008/09 and the early prevention number is up from 378 to 673.

Transport links are good, both by public transport and by road. There are good, well maintained road connections to the major road network, a frequent Metro train service to Newcastle, a regular train service to London and two nearby airports. There are high levels of satisfaction with public transport in Sunderland: 62 per cent with local bus services and 55 per cent with local transport information, both well above averages.

The 2008 Place Survey identified a lack of cohesion across different communities. Above average 64.6 per cent of people feel that they belong to their neighbourhood. But 67.2 per cent of people - which is below average - agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on. A well above average (39 per cent) number of people think there is a problem with people not treating each other with respect. A successful pilot project in Hendon which reduced racial tensions and improved community cohesion is being rolled out across the city. There is more contact with young people and increased local area working helping to identify local issues and bring local communities together. There is however limited work in schools relating to community cohesion, though all schools in Sunderland provide a good range of out of school activities for children, young people and families.

People are able to easily access computers in the City. Sunderland was one of four areas to win Beacon Status for 'digital inclusion' in March 2009 for initiatives improving quality of life, economic well-being and social cohesion in the most deprived communities. 'Digital Challenge' is a successful programme of community engagement, awareness raising and capacity building projects. The 24 community led projects include e-mentoring events, the 'Hexagon' community network for sharing information, an equipment loan scheme and Community Health Information Points (CHIP).

The 'e-neighbourhood programme' has increased computer usage in many communities and developed the skills and knowledge of the hardest to reach groups. The programme has three strands and has trained 1,100 residents in computer use. A valuable element of the service is e-mentoring available for vulnerable children, linked to skills improvement. Over 200 'E-champions' from within communities provide the link to contact and assist groups normally difficult to involve. A network of 31 'Community Electronic Village Halls', many in previously under-used church halls, provide access to 250 personal computers to overcome financial restrictions in deprived areas. This has increased opportunities to access education, employment and healthcare.

There are now 18 'Community Websites' developed by community groups in some of the most deprived areas of Sunderland. These include the Coalfield Forum, North East Refugee Service, North East Regional Alcohol Forum and Youth Net developed by pupils at Hetton School. As part of the Digital Challenge programme research by the University will measure the impact of digital inclusion initiatives in Sunderland over the next three years.

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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