

# Sunderland City Council

## Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



**oneplace**

for an independent overview  
of local public services

## Sunderland City Council

### Overall, Sunderland City 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

Overall Sunderland City Council performs well.

The Council's use of resources is good and has scored 3 out of 4 overall. The Council manages its finances well, particularly financial planning and there have been no significant overspends in recent years. The Council has appropriate levels of balances and reserves. Governance of the business is good. Risk Management is excellent and has been used to especially good effect on the Building Schools for the Future project and in preparing the medium term financial plan. Despite strong leadership and a number of ongoing projects, there is still a need to ensure the careful use of natural resources is fully included in all of the Council's activities and plans.

Sunderland City Council manages performance well, scoring 3 out of 4. Their services are helping to improve the quality of life for people in Sunderland. There is positive achievement in a range of key 2008/09 performance indicators. This includes reducing health inequalities and crime, increasing employment and education opportunities for young people and improving the environment.

Ofsted has rated the Council's children's services as performing well. A higher than average proportion of secondary schools, including the sixth forms, are good or outstanding. However, too many primary schools are rated as only satisfactory. This is also the case for childcare and childminder provision. Fostering and adoption arrangements are good. Achievement of level 2 qualification - exams such as GCSEs - by young people up to age 19 matches the national figure. However, the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training is very high and needs to be reduced.

The Care Quality Commission has rated the Council's adult social care as

excellent. People have good access to services such as intermediate care, telecare, extra care housing and supported living facilities which enable people to live independently within their own homes for longer. A joint intermediate care service is well established with Sunderland Teaching Primary care Trust (TPCT). The Wellness Service, a joint service between the Council, the TPCT and City Hospitals Sunderland has been in place for 4 years and provides preventative, targeted services for individuals and education to help people understand why healthier lifestyles are important.

The Council with partners have developed a clear long-term vision for Sunderland in the year 2025. This is based on a good understanding of needs and priorities of residents. The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan reflects the Sunderland Partnership's priorities for the City, set out in the Sunderland Strategy, and the Council has also identified four corporate improvement objectives to ensure a greater focus on efficiency and effectiveness.

## About Sunderland City Council

Sunderland is the largest city in the North East of England with a population of some 280,500. 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.

Local people receive all of their local government services from Sunderland City Council. The Council has 75 elected councillors. There are 48 Labour, 22 Conservative, 1 Liberal Democrat and 4 Independent councillors. The Council's priorities for improvement are the 5 priorities shared with the Sunderland Partnership and 4 objectives to further improve the Council to become more efficient and effective.

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.

## Organisational assessment

Sunderland City Council manages performance well and their services are helping to improve the quality of life for people in Sunderland. There is positive achievement in a range of key 2008/09 performance indicators. This includes reducing health inequalities and crime, increasing employment and education opportunities for young people and improving the environment. Place survey results in relation to resident satisfaction with the Council are around average compared to national and similar Councils.

The Council and partners have developed a clear long-term vision for Sunderland in the year 2025. This is based on a good understanding of needs

and priorities of residents. The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan reflects the Sunderland Partnership's priorities for the City, set out in the Sunderland Strategy. They are for a City that is Prosperous; a Learning City; Healthy; Safe; and Attractive & Inclusive. The Council has also identified four corporate improvement objectives to ensure a greater focus on efficiency and effectiveness. They are: delivering customer focused services; being 'One Council'; efficient and effective Council; and improving partnership working to deliver 'One City'.

## Prosperous City

Prosperity is being enhanced through major regeneration projects that provide employment and leisure opportunities to the people of Sunderland. In the last year projects have brought almost 1,500 new jobs to Sunderland. Significant projects delivered include the Sunderland Aquatic Centre providing the only Olympic size pool in the region, and the business and arts centre 'ThePlace' in Sunnyside. The Council is now tackling the need to more effectively integrate these regeneration projects into a refurbished city centre, and green areas near the centre such as Mowbray Park and Sunnyside Gardens. The Council has invested £1 million for city centre improvements and is working closely with partners to deliver major regeneration proposals. The Council also provide support and advice for the development of other key sites in the City. There is now positive progress towards developing the Vaux and Holmeside Triangle sites in the city centre. The Council and its partners are developing an Economic Masterplan for the City.

The local response to the recession is sustaining and creating jobs. During the recession the number of unemployed people has risen in line with national trends and remains about 50 per cent higher than the national average. The Council has increased support to local businesses through a range of initiatives and is talking more to key employers during the recession, to ensure they can help safeguard existing jobs. Work with employers to develop skills and provide vocational training is also increasing opportunities for employment. The increase in unemployment in the City arising from the economic downturn has reversed since June 2009, with a significant fall of 667 people over the past three months, while the national total has continued to rise. The recession also presents a major risk to the pace of delivery of Sunderland's plans to provide more local homes at an affordable price. Despite the recession, the net (ie houses built less houses demolished) number of homes created in 2008/09 increased to 299 from 186 in 2007/08. The Council is also developing proposals for a Local Housing Company.

More people can access additional advice and benefits through increased support provided. The Council co-ordinated Job Linkage service at 13 local centres has helped 942 residents into work. The number of people on out of work benefits fell from 18% in 2007/08 to 17% in 2008/09. Child poverty in Sunderland is reducing faster than other areas but remains high. In Sunderland 51% of children are within the Government definition of poverty compared to 44% in the North East and 42% in England. There is more support and use of Children centres to increase the range of support to families.

## Learning City

Services for children and young people are good overall, with education attainment improving at most key stages. Sunderland schools are improving faster than the national average. Teaching and learning opportunities are improving through the 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) programme. A new school at Washington and three new academies opened in September 2009. Schools, colleges and employers are working well together to increase opportunities for young people to acquire skills. A wider range of courses is now provided. Options for young people at age 14 and above to pursue National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) have been expanded. An Ofsted Inspection of the Implementation of reforms for 14-19 year old young people in December 2008 judged them as being good.

Early Years Services are improving. The network of 17 Children's Centres in the City has been completed and the Sunderland Children's Centres website was launched in the last year giving easier access to information. The network includes the new Millfield Community Nursery, new Diamond Hall Infant School and rebuilt Hetton Nursery.

Eleven year old children now achieve at a similar rate to the national average. However, at 70% 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. For 16 year old young people results are also improving with 43% of young people achieving five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths. This is now matching achievement in similar areas, although still being about 4% below the national average figures. But, there are inequalities in achievement, particularly for pupils from an Asian background, and at GCSE students with special educational needs do not achieve as highly as they do in other areas.

One in eight 16 to 18 year olds in Sunderland are not in employment, education or training. This is well above national and local averages. In response, the Council and partners are working with young people before they are 16 to stress the benefits of education and skills; and with young people post-16 to smooth the transition from school to college or sixth form learning. This includes, in 2008, two new 'Sunderland Futures' applied learning centres for 14-16 year old young people to be trained with links to employers. All 14 new diplomas syllabuses are offered within the City, and a wide range of courses are provided by the sixth form colleges.

Care leavers have good access to suitable accommodation and this enables them to engage in employment, education and training. Fostering and adoption arrangements are good.

The take up of literacy services, and participation in reading and library activities to improve literacy levels, are increasing. The number of visitors to libraries has increased by 8 per cent. There are Family, Learning, Literature and Numeracy (FLLN) programmes in communities. Digital challenge/e-neighbourhood programmes provide access to computers and have trained 1,100 residents in computer use. An Ofsted Inspection in November 2008 on Sunderland City Council adult and community learning provision was judged as being 'good'.

Ofsted rated the Council's children's services as 'performing well' in 2009.

## Healthy City

There is a good understanding of the health, social care and wellbeing needs of the population. 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. This is improving lifestyles with 6 centres for services jointly provided with other partners. Between April 2007 and March 2008 there were more than 300,000 attendances at Wellness Centres by people over the age of 16. This is almost twice the target of 154,000 people. The new Aquatic Centre is helping the Council to help people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. Disadvantaged groups can use the Centre more because of targeted pricing policies, free swims for elderly people and children, access arrangements for disabled people, and tailored transport arrangements.

Older people are given more support to live at home, though there was a slight fall in the reported number of people receiving assistance through social services during 2008/09. The fall is linked to a wider range of support including more access to health and services other than social care. There have been improvements in preventative services and services to support independent living. For example, the Telecare service has expanded with an alarm service response time of 20 minutes and a wider range of Telecare-enabled equipment. In 2008/09 more than 22,500 people used the service. There are positive levels of satisfaction with Adult Social Care services. Around 83 per cent of people aged 65 or over are satisfied with both home and their neighbourhood (about average). Social Care services for adults are judged to be excellent by the Care Quality Commission in 2009.

The teenage pregnancy is high in Sunderland and is not reducing significantly. In the last year the rate has increased to 57.3 per 1,000 females aged 15-17, in line with regional and national trends. Increasingly co-ordinated action by partners in Sunderland is targeted at specific areas and groups, including the expansion of the Healthy Schools Programme to colleges.

Obesity in 11 year old children in 2008/09 was 21% in Sunderland compared to the national average of 18%. 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 and increasing number of children taking school lunches in both Primary and Secondary schools.

## Safe City

The Council is working well with partners and local people to help communities feel safer. Overall crime in Sunderland is lower than similar areas in England and Wales. Feelings of safety are also improving and the gap between actual crime rates and perceptions of crime is now closing. In 2008/09 recorded crime was down three per cent from the previous year. A 2008 survey shows reductions in perceptions of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB), drink and drug related behaviour, though all are still above national averages

and those in similar authorities. The perception of ASB as a problem has fallen by 28 percentage points from 51% in 2003 to 23% in 2008, though this is still above national and North East averages and the highest of the five Tyne & Wear areas.

There are positive outcomes from a range of targeted work to reduce crime, substance misuse, Anti Social Behaviour and perception on crime that the Council contributes to. These include drug treatment programmes, a safer homes initiative, youth engagement projects, environmental enforcement work and parenting initiatives.

Re-offending by young people in Sunderland is lower than in similar areas. Youth crime in Sunderland has fallen by 6% 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. Young offenders in employment, education or training increased from 76% in 2004 to 91% 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.

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 completed promptly. But, 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.

## Attractive and Inclusive City

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% and satisfaction with cleanliness improved to 54.4% in 2008 surveys, but both these figures remain slightly below national and North East averages. Parks and open spaces satisfaction, at 63.3%, is in line with the North East average, although below the national average.

The amount of waste collected and delivered to landfill reduced by 96 tonnes in 2008/09. However, recycling rates did not improve in 2008/09, falling from 26.8% to 25.6% - remaining below national and North East average performance. New arrangements to increase the amount being recycled are being introduced. This, and the work with Gateshead and South Tyneside Councils, to provide new waste treatment facilities, aims to significantly reduce waste going to landfill.

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 wellbeing.

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

Availability of affordable housing is a significant issue for Sunderland. During 2008/09 230 affordable new homes have been provided. To help, the Council supported Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in their bids for National Affordable Housing Programme funding and liaison with the planning department to give all schemes the best opportunity for success. The 299 additional homes were built during 2008/2009 which is an improvement on the previous year's figure of 186 additional homes. The Council and partners have begun to further 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.

There is a clear focus on the needs of hard to reach and excluded groups. The 2008 Place Survey identified a lack of cohesion across different communities. An above average 64.6 per cent of people feel they belong to their neighbourhood. But 67.2% 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 number of people - 39 per cent - think there is a problem with people not treating each other with respect. Conscious of these issues, the Council and partners have delivered a successful pilot project in Hendon which reduced racial tensions and improved community cohesion - this 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. The Council has achieved level three of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

The Council is addressing a number of aspects of sustainability well and has won a national award for tackling climate change. The Council's Carbon Plan is bringing projects forward that will reduce the City's carbon footprint through using wood to burn for energy, wind energy and Carbon Trust supported programmes. Carbon emissions per capita in Sunderland reduced by 1.4% in 2008/09.

Access to services is improving. A network of customer service centres promotes local access to co-located services. The Council has introduced 24/7 customer access to Council services through the contact centre for neighbourhood-based services. This work has been done in partnership with Newcastle City Council in a model that reduces the costs to individual organisations by approximately 40%.

The Council's Sport and Leisure service are increasing chances to participate in physical activity. There are a number of City programmes and projects which are provided at a local level. Many of these programmes are offered with local partners on an area basis. Examples of current developments include the Barnes Park regeneration and two new pools at Hetton and Silksworth. Satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities, libraries,

museum/galleries and theatres/concert halls are all above national and North East averages. The modernisation of the City's swimming provision has provided a new Aquatic Centre.

## Corporate Improvement Priorities

The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) provides a clear way forward for the Council to improve and deliver its improvement objectives. The council has developed a Business Improvement Programme (BIP) to transform the council into an efficient and effective, customer focussed organisation. This is being updated to ensure a stronger focus on efficiency and use of technology. In addition the council is moving to a new Operating Model and has adopted the new Sunderland Way of Working to deliver improved customer service and ensure better use of resources. There is a good understanding of what is important for local areas, and how well local services are delivered, and a track record of responding effectively to performance issues. Local Area Plans (LAPs) have been developed for all five Area Committee localities in the City. This was through an extensive process where the Council and its elected members have engaged with the Sunderland Partnership, including community and voluntary stakeholders; and residents to identify, shape and approve local priorities.

The Council is financially secure. A comprehensive medium term financial plan is in place and the Corporate Improvement Plan integrates service plans, corporate strategies and improvement targets with financial budgets and sets out the staffing resources required to deliver the Council's plans. Good financial planning has contributed to improved outcomes on priorities such as the wellness agenda, adult social care and safeguarding children. There has been a sustained focus on achieving priorities by shifting resources from low- to high-priority areas, for example through investment in planning services, libraries, streetscape and recycling.

The capacity of the Council to continue to deliver improvements is good and being strengthened through the Business Improvement Programme and recent recruitment. Political and managerial leadership is good. Recent additions to senior management in the Council have increased capability to deliver the changes to services and structures that the Council needs to meet future challenges. The Council is working more with neighbouring Councils to improve services. Examples include the South Tyne and Wear Waste Management Partnership to reduce waste to landfill and the Tyne and Wear City Region - where joint working is aiming to improve employment opportunities and transport in the region.

The scrutiny function in the Council is improving. It has made some useful contributions to policy development and is working well. It is embedding the principles of effective scrutiny, one of which is to develop the critical challenge to the council's Cabinet, through consideration of the Executive's Forward Plan in advance of decisions being made. All other Council committees appear to be working well. A second annual Overview and Scrutiny Conference in June 2009 helped focus on delivering more effective scrutiny. The Council works well with partners with a clear focus on improving the City. This is being enhanced further through the Community Leadership Programme. The focus of the Community Leadership 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. The Partnership has changed the way it is structured, including a new Delivery and Improvement Board and Theme Delivery Plans for the five priorities, to further help the delivery of change. A major challenge is to maximise the contribution of the voluntary sector. Current work with the Sunderland Community Network on the Community Cohesion Strategy, Community Development Plan and area arrangements includes a key role for the voluntary sector.

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](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)



for an independent overview  
of local public services