

Elmbridge Borough Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Elmbridge Borough Council

Overall, Elmbridge Borough Council performs well

Managing performance	3 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	3 out of 4
Managing resources	3 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

Summary

Elmbridge Borough Council performs well overall. The Council is addressing the issues that its residents see as a priority. These are; making Elmbridge a safe and healthy place to live which has a pleasant town centres with a strong economy, supporting the local community, delivering affordable housing, providing good levels of service to its residents, ensure people get on well and have equal access to services and protecting and sustaining attractive, green and unique character of the borough. The Council has strong and clear leadership with which to deliver its aims and objectives. Councillors provide effective challenge to Heads of Service to ensure delivery of priorities and key projects.

The Council has been proactive in the way in which it has tried to address the issues created by the current recession. The Council has created the Elmbridge Civic Improvement fund to help invest in projects to promote the boroughs businesses and facilities. It has also provided wide ranging advice through its 'Recession buster' web pages.

Elmbridge scores 3 out of 4 for managing performance. It understands what is important to local people and is making improvements in these areas. Over half of residents are satisfied with the way the Council runs things this is the 46th best result nationally. The Council is working with other organisations to address the need for affordable housing through the East Surrey Housing and Employment partnership. The provision of affordable housing in a relatively affluent area with high average house prices remains a challenge and the Council is taking action to facilitate increased availability. The recession has affected the demand on services and the Council has coped well with the rise in demand on its benefits and homelessness services. The Council involves its

community is making Elmbridge a good place to live, it uses effective consultation to shape its services and is continuing to develop ways in which residents can gain access to its services.

The Council score 3 out of 4 for Use of Resources. The Council has a history of excellent financial management and was in a strong financial position heading into the current economic downturn. The Council has a proven history of managing its finances well against its budgets. The Council has sound budget monitoring arrangements in place. The Council's culture ensures continuous challenge of service costs and value for money. This is supported by strong performance management arrangements. The Council has good people management systems in place. The Council's progress on equalities issues remains slow. The Council is only meeting level 2 of the Local Government Equalities Framework

About Elmbridge Borough Council

Elmbridge is the second biggest district in Surrey, located 15 miles from central London. It is densely populated, with 131,000 residents. There is a mixture of towns, villages and countryside, with over half the land designated as Green Belt.

There are low levels of deprivation, unemployment is low and wages are high. House prices in Elmbridge are high. People are generally better qualified than in other areas. The ethnicity of the area is mostly white, however, people from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds is above average for the South East.

Health of people is generally good, with high life expectancy. However, men living in the most deprived areas live 5 years less than those in less deprived areas. Although overall poverty is low, over 2,500 children live in low income households.

The Council is Conservative-led, with 21 of the 60 seats being held by residents' associations. The borough has a five year vision with five top priorities, these are:

- Commitment to better services for our residents;
- Commitment to value for money;
- Commitment to our community;
- Commitment to our staff and volunteers; and
- Commitment to the environment.

Organisational assessment

How well is the organisation delivering its priority services, outcomes and improvements

that are important to local people?

Elmbridge's priorities reflect the needs of local people and good progress is being made in delivering outcomes against them. The Council is good at involving local people in setting its priorities and improvements to its services. The Council is effective in identifying its priorities through effective consultation. The Council regularly collect feedback from service users and residents to ensure that priorities are aligned with residents needs and to test satisfaction with services and progress against priorities.

Safe and healthy communities, vibrant town centres and a strong local economy.

The Council is working in partnership to deliver its priority to create a safe and healthy community. The Community Safety Partnership recently engaged with local residents in Walton at a Community action day attended by Surrey Fire & Rescue; Elmbridge Borough Council; Surrey County Council and Surrey Police. Residents were also asked to complete a community safety questionnaire to understand perceptions of safety and levels of antisocial behaviour.

The Council and its partners are tackling crime, the Council, County and local police have created 'no cold calling zones' across the borough to help reduce distraction burglaries. Following successful consultation in the pilot areas of Claygate, part of Hersham and a small section of North West Cobham the launch of zones was extended in August. Levels of crime within the borough have reduced significantly in the last year. The Community Safety Partnership has reported a 16.5 per cent reduction during 2008/09. The most significant reductions are in vehicle crime. Activities have included increasing the number of accredited car parks to 16 and dedicated road shows to raise awareness and promote crime reduction.

The Council is working with local businesses to ensure a vibrant economy and cope through the current recession. The Council is taking action to assist local business through the current recession. The Council has created the Elmbridge Civic Improvement fund (ECIF) which will provide funds to local businesses to help them improve the local street scene and help promote business in the area. The Council accepts that the amounts involved will not necessarily create jobs, but will help allow businesses to survive the current challenges.

The Council has identified a significant part of these funds to increase its capacity to deliver its key flagship activity to improve Walton town centre. Over a third of the ECIF budget has been awarded to the Walton High Street improvement project to allow the areas profile and identity to be raised. It has increased membership of its business network, over 250 businesses are now members and are being invited to join projects and events. Further promotion of the Network continues including the use of local radio. Community safety and fire safety messages have also been promoted to businesses. A grant has been awarded to support the development of a website for Cobham Chamber of Commerce.

The Council is delivering changes to support the local economy and promote the health of residents. It has delivered a campaign to increase take up of small business rates relief, launched a two year free swimming initiative in

April 2009 and increased the tennis for free offer to 2 sites allowing an additional 80 children to attend sessions monthly.

High quality community services and affordable housing, and efficient public services.

The Council continues to deliver affordable housing in the borough. The Council achieved 64 homes against its own target of 34 during 2008/09, this was a result early completion of one project and other initiatives. Targets for 2009/10 have been amended to reflect the current economic conditions. Wherever possible the Council is working to make land available for development and to encourage the provision of affordable housing. The Council will need to develop innovative solutions to encourage further development in the coming years.

The Council is working in partnership to increase access to affordable housing. It has signed up to the East Surrey Housing and Employment local partnership. Joint funding has been agreed for this partnership for the next two years. The aims of the partnership are to deliver housing, employment and training advice through enhanced housing options services, improve further the areas homelessness prevention activity and to involved social landlords and address issues resulting from the current recession.

The Council is using new IT solutions to increase capacity within its services. In October 2008 the Benefits service implemented an electronic document management system which has built capacity helped manage the increased demands during the recession. A new land charge administration system is being implemented which will allow the Council to deliver the service with a reduced resource allocation.

A thriving and inclusive borough.

The Council is supporting community organisations and residents to make a difference to the local area. The Council has a dedicated voluntary support officer who works with community groups and organisations to provide advice and assistance in securing outside funding. It has 800 active volunteers; it has committed to enhance and renew this strong base and has held a number of volunteer recruitment and development events.

Work is being done to promote community cohesion. The Council is working with various sectors of the community to promote understanding. Centres for Retired People have developed a strong Childrens Centre Agenda. The Claygate and Oxshott Childrens Centre is one of the first centres for both older and young residents, activities such as the Teatime dance project in partnership with local schools and the RC Sheriff. The aim is to bring young and old together through dance in a fun and creative way whilst improving health. Through the One Elmbridge Partnership the Council is targeting actions towards its most deprived areas. Work continues on projects in the St John's Estate and its surrounding areas in Walton.

The Council has launched the 'DisableGo' website which provides information to people with disabilities on access issues. Over 1000 premises have been reviewed and visitors to the website are able to consider if access is suitable

for them prior to visiting. The website is proving popular with significant numbers of hits.

Better access.

The Council is improving access to services. A customer services improvement programme has been introduced which has delivered a number of changes to the service. Including a review of the Councils customer service standards, changes to the main reception area, a new information service at Walton library and a standardisation of open hours for all services at the Civic Centre. These improvements have led to increased levels of satisfaction. The overall customer satisfaction increased to 72 per cent from 65 per cent in local surveys.

Enhanced electronic access to Council services is being delivered. The Council has revised its website.. Work continues to enhance the 'My Elmbridge' service on the front-page of the website. The new look website enables residents to, at a glance, check out the services that affect or interest them. Users can now personalise what they see or don't see on each page, and check out what is "nearest" to them.

Environmental responsibility and climate change.

The Council is taking the lead in promoting environmental responsibility, and the challenges of climate change. A Climate Change Group, including Members and officers is in place. The group is looking at where the Council can reduce its own impact on the climate. Refurbishment works at the Civic Centre and water and energy saving measures have been implemented. Water butts have been installed to provide water for the green areas outside the Civic Centre, a reduction of nearly 1 million litres of water per year has been achieved following installation of water saving cisterns. Energy consumption is expected to be reduced by more than 80,000 KWh at the Civic Centre, enough electricity to power 14 houses. Since April 2008 more than 150 people have been helped with energy advice through its Care and Repair service and web portal to Warmfront. Also, 2000 energy saving light bulbs are being distributed free of charge to vulnerable residents.

The Council is promoting the use of public transport as an alternative to driving to work to reduce its carbon footprint. In partnership with local businesses, a pilot shuttle bus between Esher station and the town to make it more convenient for people to travel by train and also help to reduce congestion is in place.

Elmbridge is recycling and composting more household waste than last year. The Council reviewed the specification of its waste collection service and took on board local objection to alternate weekly waste collection. A trial of segregated weekly kitchen waste for composting was introduced. It has allowed the Council to jointly procure equipment with two other authorities, achieving significant long term savings, addressing residents concerns and meeting local demand for weekly kitchen waste collection. The full roll out of this service will be during the later part of 2009. It has also introduced a direct debit facility to encourage take up of the garden waste service to its already growing garden waste collection service-currently with almost 13,000

households subscribing.

The Council and its Environmental forum are promoting environmental awareness among residents. The Council's Winter 2008 magazine was focused on sustainability and promoted ways in which residents could reduce energy consumption. It included specific help for vulnerable people including the elderly. The Forum produces regular newsletters and involves residents in environmental projects.

Retaining the Borough's attractive, green and unique character.

Residents are satisfied that the area is being kept clear from litter and refuse. Results from the 2008 place survey show that 7 out of 10 residents are satisfied with the local area being kept clear of litter and refuse, ranked 18th best nationally. The street cleaning service achieved a 5 star rating from the British Cleaning Council which recognised the work being done to keep the borough clean and tidy.

Grass and verge cutting has improved following the return of the service to the Council. The number of annual cuts has increased from a reported five to eleven. A more effective mapping process is being developed to ensure all areas are covered by the service.

The Council is improving public open spaces. It is investing in maintaining and improving Esher Commons Site of Special Scientific Interest. This has improved access to the Black Pond area, allowing more light and providing a pleasant place for walking and exercising. It will also allow the remaining trees space to develop and spread, as well as developing woodland for the longer term. The second year of restoration was undertaken on Oxshott Heath and Fairmile Common during the winter of 2007/08.

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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