

Good Practice Case Study

Leicestershire County Council manages performance 'Excellently'



Leicestershire County Council employees

Leicestershire County Council: An 'Excellent' transformation ▾

Leicestershire County Council's aim is to make Leicestershire the best place in which to live and work – by listening and acting on local people's views, leading partnership activity and delivering great public services that offer outstanding value for money.

Leicestershire County Council has long been recognised as a strong-performing organisation, and in the 2009 Comprehensive Area

Assessment (CAA) organisational assessment report was assessed as 'Excellent', one of only 10 councils to be judged so. Impressively, independent benchmarking of the national indicators named Leicestershire as the top performing County area despite having the second lowest net budgeted spend of all County Councils (see Fig 1.) Surveys of the local community now show nine out of ten people say they like where they live.

Leicestershire attributes its success to a range of factors including; strong and stable political and managerial leadership, a ‘high performance’ culture, high calibre and stable workforce, strong front line and support services modernised through an ambitious transformation programme, culture of partnership working with other agencies and focus on community engagement.

‘I am delighted that what we have been building here in Leicestershire for some time is now being widely recognised through the CAA, national indicators and LGC ‘Council of the Year’ award as something special. I hope some of our approaches can act as both a model and inspiration to others seeking to achieve similar high performance’.

Cllr David Parsons CBE

Average Performance Scores Vs Net Budgeted Spend 08/09

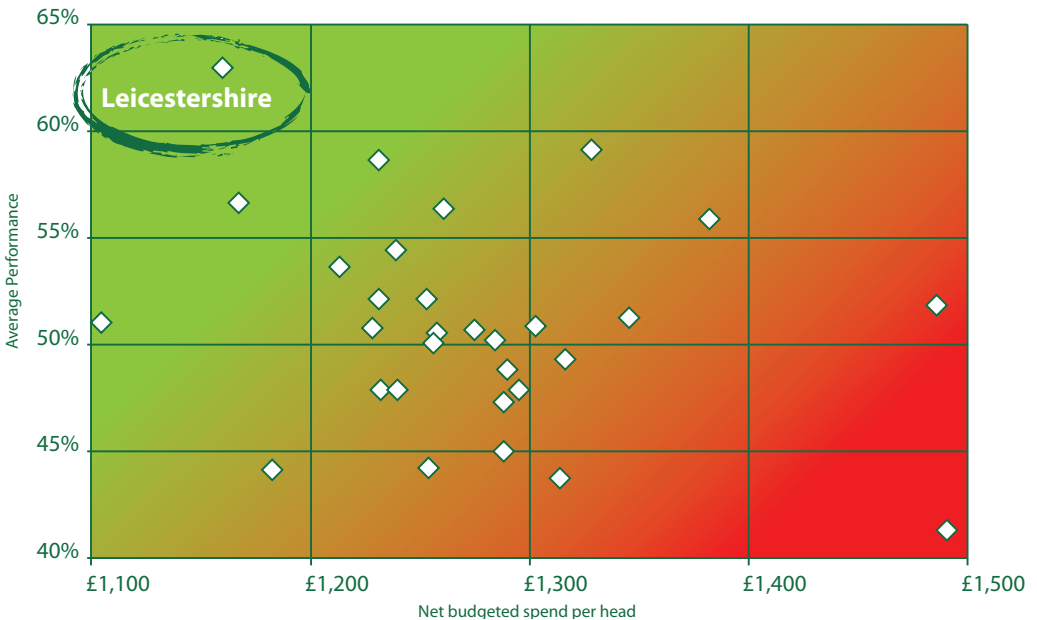


Fig 1. Graph to show councils’ average performance scores vs bugeted spend 08/09

Leading the vision for transformation ▾

Leicestershire covers an area of 208,000 hectares, with a population of 640,000 residents. The Council has an 8,000-strong team (excluding school based staff).

The Council is now in the fourth year of its five-year strategic change programme, designed to improve all areas of its work as well as services to its communities, in a cost-efficient and flexible way. The delivery of the programme has helped to further drive forward the overall performance of the Council from strong foundations.

High performance culture and leadership

Leicestershire County Council has enjoyed an incredibly strong, inspirational political and managerial leadership team, coupled with relative stability for the past decade. This has helped create solid foundations to allow the senior management team to embed a high-performance culture throughout the organisation, led from the top-down.

A three-year corporate and financial strategy for the organisation, with clear improvement objectives and targets, embraces both relevant national priorities and key local priorities established in the County local area agreement.

Improvement planning is coordinated at corporate level, with a strong research function ensuring a firm

improvement evidence base. Teamed with cross-department and multi-agency research meetings this develops strong understanding of the issues facing communities and where priorities lie. With a forward-facing and outcomes-focused service planning approach and high ambitions driving delivery at pace, there is a strong culture of continuous improvement within the Council.

The strong performance culture, including robust performance monitoring, is used to inform improvement discussions, actions and change. Performance monitoring is actively used to determine additional management action where required, including the prioritisation of resources into identified areas.

For example, it was identified that Leicestershire libraries were being under-utilised; specifically, the numbers of children using libraries was in decline. Consequently Leicestershire County Council introduced a Library Investment Programme, to revamp and rebuild the area's libraries, increase the services offered such as IT and encourage people to return. Library visits increased by 13% in 2009 and over 88% of feedback is now positive; the Council is the only county library authority to achieve 9 out of the 10 Public Library Service Standards and is the highest performing county nationwide.



Visitors at Oadby Library, Leicestershire

Transforming front line and support services

No matter how strong the leadership, Leicestershire County Council recognises that delivering success is equally attributable to the work of front line staff and the underpinning support services.

In 2006 the Council launched a five-year Strategic Change Programme designed to:

- Implement a new approach to customers, putting them at the heart of activity.
- Transform working practices through a Work Well programme, including flexible and mobile working, enabling employment policies and a new approach to reward and recognition.
- Modernise support services and drive both efficiencies and continuous improvement.

Four years into the programme, services are now more accessible and people have more choice and control;

- The Work Well programme has changed the way staff work and is reducing office facilities from 53 to 22 with 'Agile IT' delivering new and innovative technology supporting more flexible working.
- A Customer First Programme is transforming the customer experience through the use of professional, dedicated customer service staff, supported by a Council-wide Customer Relationship Management System.
- The Organisational Efficiency Programme has implemented a strategic approach to procurement and category management. The Council has transformed HR, Finance, ICT and Asset Management support services

through the introduction of shared services and greater use of self-service, and is now focusing on delivering efficiency improvements within front-line services.

- The Council's personalisation programme is further improving the Council's highly rated Adult Social Care service by ensuring access to universal services, building in prevention and early intervention and helping communities to develop support locally.
- A Highways Efficiency Programme is delivering improvements to procurement, structural change and process improvement. The ground-breaking Midland Highways Alliance (funded by EM IEP), comprising 13 local authorities and the Highways Agency, will deliver forecasted savings of £16.75m by 2013. The Alliance is recognised as best practice by the Department for Transport and also through the award of a CAA Green Flag.
- The Council is now the top county area for recycling and its Waste Strategy is minimising waste, encouraging reuse, recycling and composting to minimise environmental impact.

This not only benefits the workforce but also creates a rigorous structure to drive customer-focused results. Employees who spend more than 50% of their time in the field are

eligible to become Mobile and Flexible Workers, and Phase 1 incorporated 180 employees. A strong focus on strategic asset management will reduce the current portfolio of more than 50 office bases to just 22. This Office Strategy coupled with investment in IT and information management through the Work Well Programme will enable greater numbers of staff to become mobile workers, using touchdown points across the County.

High Calibre Workforce and Communications

The transformation programme is underpinned by an innovative People Strategy. This has brought in new organisational values and introduced the concept of the Leicestershire Manager, supported by a new Management Competency Framework. Strategy success includes a substantial reduction in staff absence from 9.3 days in 2006/7 to 7.2 days by December 2009. The Council was recently ranked among the top five most improved employers by Stonewall and achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard with a plan to achieve 'Excellent' by March 2011.

A strong performance framework cascades corporate improvement priorities throughout the whole Council and to individual level. This enables staff to understand their own improvement priorities and how these contribute to those of the

organisation as a whole. Updates on successes and improvement targets are communicated via various routes and staff are involved through a number of channels including:

- Regular internal briefings from the Chief Executive
- A staff Speak Up Website
- Bi-annual employee survey
- Staff Appraisal and Development Meetings

High performance also requires well trained staff and managers. An innovative new Leadership in Partnership Programme aimed at developing public managers from across the Leicestershire public sector has been developed with Warwick University Business School. Through EM IEP funding the programme is promoting a 'whole systems – total place' approach to redesigning local public services across agencies and breaking down organisational silos. The programme is helping develop leadership capacity and capability across the county.

This clear and focused performance and support approach is welcomed by Council employees – benchmarking staff satisfaction shows that Leicestershire staff are more positive than average and lead the way in certain areas such as management of change.

Engaging Residents and Communities in Co-production

Community engagement in service design is an important element in achieving high satisfaction and good service outcomes. With Leicestershire's large and diverse population, it is crucial that the Council finds the most pertinent and relevant way of engaging with its hard-to-reach groups.

Leicestershire, working with Melton Borough Council, has recently demonstrated its commitment to this with the redesign of its project 'Engagement with Hard to Reach Communities in Need.' A short term Project Manager was appointed in October 2009 to undertake journey mapping of stories from the Priority Neighbourhoods within Leicestershire. The analysis of the journey mapping was then undertaken collaboratively by the Project Manager with support from De Montfort University.

This activity was undertaken by a council that already demonstrates significant engagement with its diverse communities, including:

- 27 Community Forums where County staff and public service partners meet with local residents to explore their community needs and concerns
- A 'Welcome to Leicestershire' pack devised specifically for foreign nationals coming to live in the county, containing practical advice

- A support group run by the Youth Service to support young asylum seekers and refugees
- A Leicestershire Working Together Forum, with representation from various different equality groups has been set up to scrutinise the County Partnership, Leicestershire Together
- Piloting participatory budgeting so that local groups can be involved in targeting resources at key local needs

Putting in place partnership building blocks for a new decade of excellence ▾

The very heart of Leicestershire County Council's ethos is continuous improvement and therefore there is no question that this recent CAA scoring means that the Council will be content to 'rest on its laurels.' Rather, the impressive results so far are viewed as simply a platform from which to build further ambitious plans.

As part of this the Council has embraced the importance of harnessing partner contributions to delivery of the community outcomes and efficiencies required in the future. A major area of focus is the local 'Total Place' pilot which is driving partnership working to a new level. Through the pilot the Council and partners are delivering changes in the way drug and alcohol services are managed as well as rationalising and streamlining public access to services.

A new Public Service Board, jointly chaired by County Council Leader David Parsons and the Leader of

Leicester City Council, is overseeing an ambitious Joint Change Programme which will contribute to a £200m efficiency target set in the local Multi-Area Agreement. The programme involves developing joint back and front office services such as customer service points across various partner agencies.

The Total Place approach is an ambitious plan, but as Leicestershire Chief Executive John Sinnott says;

"The aim is to make ours the best place in which to live and work – everything we do revolves around this ambition. However, this is no easy challenge, and requires a focus and a drive across a partnership covering city and county. There is certainly a leadership role for local government but the key is taking our partners with us. The old ways of working in the public sector have to change and we are determined to be in the forefront, showing how it can be done and how citizens and taxpayers benefit."

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East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

The East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (EM IEP) is committed to celebrating the successful, innovative and imaginative project work that exists in the East Midlands region.

The EM IEP Support Team publish case studies showing how East Midlands councils are improving services, and delivering significant improvements and efficiencies.

The case studies are intended to inspire councils in the region, and indeed nationally, to transform services and benefit from the processes developed by those councils that have pioneered the way forward.

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