

Cheshire West

Area Assessment

Pre-publication version dated 19 October 2009

Provided under embargo

If you have any concerns about the assessment please discuss them with your CAA Lead first.



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of local public services

Children and Young People

Healthy lifestyles are supported well. Schools help children to be healthy and adopt healthy lifestyles. Arrangements for keeping children safe are good in most services and most providers are effective in protecting children from harm and helping them to stay safe.

Children and young people's educational outcomes are mainly good. Provision for the youngest children including childminders, child care providers and nursery schools is good in most cases and children are helped to achieve well. Good performance continues into primary schools where most children enjoy their time at school and achieve well. There is room for improvement in a number of secondary schools as only twenty eight out of the forty four schools inspected are assessed to be good or better, lower performance than elsewhere in the country. Only fourteen of the twenty four school sixth forms are judged to be good. There is very little inadequate provision however. Two out of four children's homes inspected were judged to be good while two were satisfactory, performance below other parts of the country.

Children and young people are encouraged to make a positive contribution to their communities. Provision for achieving economic well-being is good in most services. A high proportion of providers help children to develop skills that may contribute to their ability to get work and be successful.

Health and Well-Being

The overall health of most people in West Cheshire is good. People in West Cheshire live longer than people living in other parts of England. However, there are big differences in life expectancy depending where people live. Within the poorest parts of West Cheshire, people live about 13 years less than people who live in the more well-off areas. This gap has increased over recent years.

People in the least well-off areas are more likely to get diseases, such as cancer and heart disease than people living in the most well-off parts of West Chester. There are over twice as many deaths from heart disease in people aged under 75 in the less well-off areas of West Cheshire than in the better off areas.

Partners understand the health of the local population, and where health inequalities exist. Plans are being developed and services are targeted to address health needs. There are some projects to improve health underway. The "Western Cheshire Health Check" identifies risk of ill health early and aims to better manage health conditions in the community and reduce hospital admissions.

West Cheshire has significantly more hospital stays for alcohol related harm than most other parts of England. Partners have recently started to work together to tackle these alcohol issues.

Improving health and reducing health inequalities in West Cheshire is an important local priority for partners. Progress so far has been too slow and while plans are now being put in place, the pace of progress needs to speed up. We will continue to check progress in the next year.

Ageing population and adult social care

A good start has been made in developing social care services for older people and vulnerable adults. Partners still need to develop a broader approach to planning for the areas rising older population.

The Council has made a good start in the six months since it was established. It shows an effective and positive approach to improving adult care services. The Council has started to review the needs of the area and determine the shape and nature of the social care services that it will deliver. The Council is developing effective working arrangements with partners, including the NHS. Some developments and services have gone beyond piloting and have moved into the roll-out stage. The Council has already shown it has capacity to meet savings targets.

People now live longer and there will be more older people within West Cheshire in the future. The Council has introduced Personal Care Budgets to enable people to choose their care in line with their own needs. These are already having a positive impact.

Partners have not yet effectively addressed the needs of the growing numbers of older people. They have committed to deal with this as a priority but plans currently focus on health and social care instead of the wider challenges faced by older people. Only three in ten older people receive the support they need to live independently.

Partners consult with older people but this is limited in its approach. Existing arrangements enable partners to effectively consult over care services and do inform decision making. New plans and ways to consult with the local ageing population are being drawn up which aim to address the wider lifestyle needs of older people but these are not yet in place.

We will continue to check the progress that is being made in developing services for older people.

Jobs and Enterprise

West Cheshire traditionally had a stable local economy with low numbers of people out of work and a wide range of local businesses. The recession is having an impact. The number of people who are claiming job seekers allowance has risen by two thirds in the last 12 months. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has risen. Partners have a clear understanding of the local economy and work closely to understand the challenges of the recession.

The recession provides a big risk for the economy. This is because of the large reliance on banking and car-making businesses. About a third of firms in the area are at risk, and over two thirds are at risk in the Dodleston ward of Chester which contains the Chester Business Park and hosts some major financial employers.

Fewer people are out of work than the rest of England but the number of people who are claiming job seekers allowance has risen by two thirds in the last 12 months. The Stanlow and Wolverham wards in Ellesmere Port have the largest number of people out of work in the area. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training has risen. Job vacancies for young people have halved in the last year.

Support to local business has been good. Despite only being in existence since April 2009, partners have already responded to some local issues. Partners share information to target their efforts in the right place and at the right time. A "Credit Crunch Panel" of councillors has identified actions needed to bring about improvement and there is a partnership action plan. The Redundancy Action Support Team has worked with several businesses in the area to support jobs at risk of redundancy. The West Cheshire Employability Partnership is performing well and further education is good. Apprenticeship opportunities are good and the "Train to Gain" programme is successful with people starting into employment doubling between 2007/08 and 2009/10.

Government funding for 250 new jobs across West Cheshire will support unemployed 18-24 year olds in most need. Partners provide support to newly unemployed people and those who have been out of work for six months or more to help them improve their skills or find work. Mobile information units and outreach services provide support to residents and businesses in isolated rural wards.

West Cheshire has many places of interest and the tourism industry is strong. However, there has been a lack of services to support its development. Partners are working to improve this and create new opportunities to promote the area as a place to visit.

Environmental Sustainability

Good progress is being made in promoting environmental sustainability. Recycling is high and work to reduce the local carbon footprint is underway. The condition of local roads and public transport are of concern to local people.

People of West Cheshire recycle and compost more than other areas. The amount of waste created has fallen and recycling rates have risen. Three-quarters of local people are satisfied with waste collection.

Partners have been successful in reducing CO2 emissions in line with their plans by installing cavity wall insulation, providing incentives for renewable energy in homes and planning policies to encourage sustainability. Community groups are being supported to reduce their carbon footprint through the Cheshire and Warrington Low Carbon Communities Network. The village of Ashton Hayes has reduced carbon emissions by 22.8 per cent since 2006.

Six out of ten people are satisfied with the standard of litter collection in the area. Information is used to target areas with the biggest litter problems - for example, in Chester City Centre.

The standard of the main roads in the areas is high when compared with other areas. The number of reported defects and potholes on roads is increasing though. The condition of local roads is not as good and there is a high-level of complaints from local people about these. A review of Highway Maintenance is taking place to improve the roads.

Less than half of people in the area are satisfied with local bus services and local transport information.

Access to key services such as health care and employment from rural and poorer areas is not always good. Partners have started to address this in certain areas - the Mersey Dee Alliance "Workwise" project. Partners know there is more to do.

Housing

The condition of housing in Ellesmere Port is poor and does not meet the Government's standards for decency in housing. The percentage of homes that fail to comply with the requirement is increasing and recent estimates predict that some 2300 homes will not meet the standard by March 2011. Full achievement of the standard is only predicted to be in place after 2013 and is dependent on the outcome of a future options appraisal to determine the ownership and management of Council homes.

The Council is beginning to address this long-standing matter. An independent survey of Cheshire West and Chester Landlord Services has been carried out. This survey confirmed that services are poor and are unlikely to get better based on current arrangements.

The Council has taken some action to make some immediate improvements. It has responded to the independent report and adopted its recommendations. A new management team is in place and is developing an action plan to address short-term weaknesses.

The Council and its partners are clear that a medium to long-term approach is required to further improve the standard of housing in Ellesmere Port. This is being put in place and will include decisions on who will manage the housing stock in future years and how extra funding can be released for improvements. Following advice from the Council and its partners, the tenants will decide the course of action to take and a consultation exercise is planned to take place next year. After the tenants decision, a new approach to delivering housing in Ellesmere Port will be implemented within six to twelve months to support the required improvements.

This is an important issue for the area. We will continue to monitor progress and will carry out an inspection in 2010.

House prices are mostly higher than in other areas which make it difficult for first time buyers. The number of affordable homes that were made available in 2008/09 was 215. 186 affordable homes have already been completed against the target of 275 for this year. The Council has attracted funding and has plans to build significant numbers of new affordable homes over the next seven years.

Demand for Council housing is increasing. Because of market conditions affordable housing is scarce and demand for Council housing has increased. In Ellesmere Port the waiting list for Council houses has almost trebled. The Council intends to introduce "Choice Based Lettings" across the area by March 2010 so people have more choice within the local housing market.

Private sector stock condition is a priority for the Council. Housing stock surveys have been completed this year with further planned for next year. A Homes Assistance policy has been approved and Cheshire West and Chester Council intend to introduce "Empty Homes" and "Affordable Warmth" strategies to help vulnerable people.

The needs of the increasing older people population in West Cheshire are

being effectively planned for. People are living longer so there will be increased demand for single person or extra care housing.

People who are homeless receive improved services. One example from many is a new scheme called "Cheshire Nightstop" which provides emergency accommodation for vulnerable young people in the homes of approved volunteers. Modelled on the national scheme, this ensures young people have a safe place to stay while their needs are assessed and a long-term solution is found. Partners now work with voluntary sector organisations to better understand homelessness needs and will develop services to meet these needs.

This assessment includes the summary and full text that it is intended to appear on the oneplace website in December. Your CAA Lead will have discussed this assessment, including any flags, with you in recent weeks.

Please read this assessment in conjunction with our letter to you dated 19 October 2009.

If you have any concerns about the assessment please discuss them with your CAA Lead first.

From 10 December 2009 you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website.

For more information, go to www.audit-commission.gov.uk/oneplace



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