

Birmingham

Area Assessment (Summary version)

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oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Birmingham at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Birmingham. 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

-  Green flag: Tackling climate change and reducing CO2 emissions
-  Green flag: Working in partnership to meet housing need

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

-  Red flag: Returning home after a stay in hospital

The local area

Birmingham is the largest city outside London. It has a population of over a million people. Located at the heart of the West Midlands, it is at the centre of England's road, rail and air networks. Over the last few years the City centre has been transformed into a thriving commercial and cultural centre. It's also a green city with 3,400 hectares of park and open space and many miles of canals.

Birmingham's economy has undergone a significant change over the past three decades with the service sector replacing manufacturing as the principal source of employment. Manufacturing continues to be a key element of the city's economy though, with an increasing focus on high-technology production.

Birmingham has some of the most deprived areas in England, unemployment is high and people's health is quite poor.

After years of population decrease, linked to the decline in manufacturing industries, Birmingham is growing again. The population is becoming increasingly diverse. More than a third of the population is now from black and minority ethnic communities, and by 2026 it is expected that no single ethnic group will form most of the city's population. Birmingham is a comparatively young city - in 2006, almost half of the population was under 30. But the over-85s age group is expected to increase significantly.

Birmingham's public services have agreed the following challenges that they need to tackle:

Be healthy - enjoy long and healthy lives

Enjoy a high quality of life - benefit from good housing and renowned cultural and leisure opportunities

Make a contribution - value one another and play an active part in the community.

Stay safe in a clean, green city - living in safe and clean neighbourhoods

Succeed economically - benefit from education, training, jobs and investment

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

How is Birmingham doing?

Be healthy - enjoy long and healthy lives

The health of most of the people of Birmingham is worse than the England average. Infant mortality and life expectancy are significantly worse.

Across the City there are also stark contrasts. Men from the most well-off areas can expect to live 9.5 years longer than those in the more deprived areas. For women, this difference is nearly 8 years. The Council and its partners know how serious health inequalities are and are working hard to improve them. Fewer babies are dying before their first birthday than in recent years. The figure is still too high and is among the highest in the country. Infant mortality is part of the reason life expectancy figures are so poor.

The partners working to tackle health problems have some big challenges to face because of the scale and diversity of the City. However they do need to work better together to start to make faster progress.

Enjoy a high quality of life - benefit from good housing and renowned cultural and leisure opportunities

Over half of Birmingham's population live in areas that are classed as the most deprived in England. In common with many large cities, poor quality housing has been a long standing problem in Birmingham. The links between poor housing and health inequality and reduced life chances have long been understood by the partners. Not only are they working hard to improve the existing poor quality housing, they are also tackling some specific challenges in the future. Partners are making significant progress in tackling high levels of homelessness.

Social housing in the city is on target to be brought up to the decent homes standard by 2010. The partners are working hard to ensure more housing is built in the city. The Council has secured extra money to build new homes and beat its affordable housing targets this year. Given the economic downturn this has been a significant achievement made possible through good joint working with the Council, housing associations and housing developers.

As well as good housing the partners also see that providing renowned cultural and leisure opportunities are a priority to improve the quality of life in Birmingham. Over the past 15 years new investment, private and public, has transformed the centre, boosting Birmingham's reputation as a cultural, service and commercial centre. Visitor numbers are up and leisure and tourism now contributes an estimated £4.4 billion to the local economy. The challenge for the partners is to ensure that the leisure and cultural opportunities are taken up by the more disadvantaged communities, who could benefit more from them than they do now.

Make a contribution - value one another and play an active part in the community.

This priority is about the people of Birmingham valuing one another and actively contributing to the community. The percentage of residents who agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area is high. The proportion is among the highest across the country. However the number of residents who usually vote in local elections is very low and Birmingham has one of the lowest voting rates in the UK.

Strengthening community cohesion and integration among and between residents of different communities is a priority for the partners. The partners have set an objective of being the most cohesive city in the UK. At the last survey fewer people in the City believe people from different backgrounds get on well together than in most other places. Similarly a very low proportion of people surveyed said they felt they belonged to their neighbourhood. The 'Be Birmingham' partnership which brings public, private and community organisations together is taking extra steps now to find better ways of understanding and measuring cohesion. It is developing a community cohesion index for the City which will look at how well different needs are being met and what more has to be done. We will watch with interest as to how this develops next year.

Partners work well with voluntary groups and they make a key contribution to the life of the City. The Council also recognises and values the role of carers and the vital contribution they make to supporting and improving the quality

of life of some of the most vulnerable people.

Stay safe in a clean, green city - living in safe and clean neighbourhoods

Compared with the other big cities, Birmingham is a safe place. Total crime is down by 33 per cent over the last five years and last year had the lowest crime rate of the eight big cities of England. The numbers of violent crimes in the city fell by seven per cent last year.

Although there have been some recent improvements following concerted action from the Council, procedures for protecting the most vulnerable children in Birmingham are not yet good enough.

The city now has a specific partnership leading on tackling climate change and has made some real progress. There have been big reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Whilst there have been some improvements in the level of street cleaning and fewer problems with graffiti local people still think there is much room for improvement. The Council has been aiming to reduce the amount of waste it needs to collect and dispose of in the city by encouraging people to recycle more and throw away less. The amount recycled has increased but it is still well below the rate that the best performing areas are achieving and the total amount of waste produced is still high in comparison to other towns and cities.

Succeed economically - benefit from education, training, jobs and investment

Birmingham is the regional centre for the West Midlands and it has a vital role in securing the future of the region. The regional economy is driven by what happens in Birmingham and the area's leadership role is critical to the prosperity and well being of the region.

Partners have worked well together and have good plans to face the challenges of achieving economic success. The recession has made the task all the more difficult. They have responded well and put in place some good schemes and initiatives to support people who are losing their jobs and help businesses to survive.

Levels of unemployment are very high in Birmingham, higher than similar cities. Birmingham has a smaller proportion of people who have higher level skills and qualifications than nationally. During the past year the unemployment rate of people without qualifications has risen twice as fast as those with qualifications. Given the importance of this issue to the economic success of the city, more needs to be done to create more jobs and ensure people in Birmingham have the skills to get them.

Good progress has been made in some areas of educational attainment. Standards at the end of primary school, while in line with similar areas, are below those nationally. The attainment of Birmingham pupils has been rising

at GCSE level and the significant gap that used to exist for pupils achieving five good GCSEs (including English and Maths) between Birmingham and the national average is closing. But the city still faces a big problem with an overall lack of skills in the workforce, making it harder for people to get jobs and for the city to grow and attract new business.

The recession has hit the West Midlands hard and the city now needs to work better across the region with other areas to tackle the problems that are standing in the way of achieving economic success.

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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