

Bracknell Forest

Area Assessment (Summary version)

Dated 9 December 2009



oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Bracknell Forest at a glance

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

No green flags have been identified for Bracknell Forest

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

No red flags have been identified for Bracknell Forest

The local area

Bracknell Forest is in central Berkshire, about 30 miles from central London. It has a population of over 113,000 with most living in urban areas. A third of the area is woodland and Metropolitan Green Belt. As well as the town of Bracknell it includes Sandhurst, Crowthorne, Binfield and North Ascot.

Most people in Bracknell Forest are of working age, with low numbers of older people. There are low levels of deprivation, with above average wages and a high number of jobs. Unemployment and the number of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance are low. People living in Bracknell Forest are healthy, but inequalities do exist.

The Local Strategic Partnership, known as the Bracknell Forest Partnership, brings together the public, business and voluntary and community sectors.

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

Cohesive Communities

Desirable Place

Thriving Population

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

How is Bracknell Forest doing?

Cohesive Communities

The Partnership encourages local residents to get more involved in their neighbourhoods, and to get to know one another better. The number of volunteers for community work has tripled in the past year as many people want to help vulnerable people and improve the quality of life in their community. This is important as a recent survey shows people in the area are less likely to be volunteers than many other parts of the country.

Bracknell Forest continues to be a safe place to live although crime increased in 2008/09 in contrast with a national reduction. The police unit covering Bracknell Forest, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead, the East Berkshire Basic Command Unit (BCU), underperformed for several years in some key crime detection and reduction areas. This led to an inspection to identify what needed to be done differently. It ranked among the lowest performing BCUs in the country in certain important aspects of policing. Following the inspection the police are strengthening their response to crime across East Berkshire, including Bracknell Forest. We will report in future assessments whether this action is achieving results. The Partnership has achieved a decrease in the number of community nuisance and disorder incidents.

The proportion of young people gaining qualifications has increased steadily since 2004, particularly among young people from lower income backgrounds whose qualifications at age 19 are now in line with the average. The proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training increased in 2008 and is now above the average for similar areas.

The area is coping well with the recession. For example, while the number of unemployed people increased in the 12 months to August 2009 the increase was the lowest in Berkshire, and overall the number remains below regional and national averages. House prices also fell between July 2008 and July 2009 although the decrease is less than many other parts of the South East.

Desirable Place

Plans to regenerate Bracknell town centre will take longer to complete than originally thought because of the recession. The Council and its partners have made progress where possible including improvements to the area near the railway station and better facilities for passengers. In addition rebuilding Garth Hill College and the recently completed Bracknell and Wokingham College building, both on the edge of the town centre, show that progress is being made. However completion of the town centre will take place over a longer period of time than originally planned. This is an area of significant interest to local people and we will monitor progress in future.

The Partnership met its target for building affordable housing in 2008/09, but over the past few years the demand for housing, particularly affordable housing, has exceeded demand. This means there is a shortage of affordable homes, notably affordable rented accommodation. Longer term housing targets mean a significant increase in the number of homes to be built in Bracknell Forest. This is a challenge for the Partnership as much of the area is protected environmentally. The Council has tackled these problems by agreeing a timetable to allocate sites for future growth over the next two years. We will report in future assessments on longer term action to reduce the shortage of affordable housing.

The Climate Change Partnership was formed in March 2009. Its initial focus is to build on the Council's approach to tackling climate change and to extend this to other partners. This will help the Partnership show the leadership necessary in this important area. Carbon emissions in Bracknell Forest are lower than many other parts of the country and the south-east. Recycling and composting rates are high and increasing, and waste sent to landfill will reduce even more when a new energy-from-waste plant opens in 2009. However, the energy efficiency of homes in Bracknell is poor - partly because there are 1,000 privately owned mobile homes which are often poorly insulated and have inefficient heating. However even without these homes, energy efficiency in Bracknell Forest needs improvement, so the Partnership is promoting schemes such as 'Warmfront' to tackle this issue. We will report how well the Partnership is tackling these issues in future assessments.

Car ownership is higher than the national average, with many households owning two or more cars. Initiatives to reduce traffic congestion in the borough have resulted in an increase in walking, cycling, rail and bus use. However many residents are reluctant to use alternatives to their cars and traffic congestion, although reduced, remains an important issue for local people.

Thriving Population

The Bracknell Forest Partnership is improving the health of people living and working in the area. Residents are healthier than in many other parts of the country, and overall health is improving. There are differences in life expectancy between the poorer and more affluent neighbourhoods, but this gap has reduced significantly. Projects to improve health are targeted at more deprived areas and particular groups at risk - such as projects to help pregnant women stop smoking. It can be difficult for people without their own transport to get to one of the three local hospitals (Wexham Park) although a bus service organised by the Council serves this site. The Partnership is working to provide a new, local health facility - the Bracknell Healthspace - which will make many services easier for residents to use.

Children and young people in Bracknell are healthy. Obesity rates are below the national average for children just starting school but have increased for older children. More children are now playing sport. Child and adolescent mental health services are good. The use of drugs and alcohol by children and young people is well below the average for similar areas and the number of teenagers becoming pregnant is reducing faster than in many other parts of the country. The number of young first time offenders is below national

average and an increasing proportion of young offenders are in education, employment and training.

Support for vulnerable families is good. The Partnership is working to make sure that education, housing, health and social care services are better coordinated to remove duplication and make services more integrated.

Health and adult social care services promote choice for vulnerable people. Vulnerable people are encouraged to contribute their views about the quality of services and partners respond effectively to the concerns raised. Support is given to older people to help them access services and have active social lives, which helps prevent isolation. The Council needs to ensure that there is a timely supply of extra care housing options for older people and to make sure that older people with mental health needs get the care they need quickly.

The Partnership is good at supporting carers of vulnerable people. The PCT, Council and the voluntary sector work hard to identify carers and find out what is important to them. This is done through publicity and support groups as well as targeted support through GP surgeries.

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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