

# North Norfolk District Council

## Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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of local public services

## North Norfolk District Council

Overall, North Norfolk District Council performs adequately

Managing performance	2 out of 4
Use of resources	3 out of 4
Managing finances	3 out of 4
Governing the business	2 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

North Norfolk District Council performs adequately overall. It is committed to helping local people enjoy a high quality of life and to looking after the beautiful North Norfolk environment. It is effectively tackling most of the issues that are important to local people, but it is failing in the provision of housing, which is one of its main priorities. The Council is generally well organised and councillors and staff work well together. There are some good quality services, such as waste and recycling and adequate value for money is being achieved overall.

There is a difference between the scores for managing performance and use of resources. We decided that the overall score should be that North Norfolk District Council performs adequately because, while it generally provides good services, it is failing in the important priority of making sure that there are enough homes, especially affordable ones for local people. This is a top priority for the Council. The high number of second homes has made housing unaffordable for many local people. This is why it is so important for the Council to be doing everything possible to find local people somewhere affordable to live. Staff capacity is stretched and made worse by comparatively high sickness absence. This makes it hard for the Council to meet all the demands on its services, while also making sure services are provided in the most efficient way and that its contracts and partnerships are performing well.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. It is committed to making sure that the district has active and sustainable communities and that the environment is protected, as these are the main priorities for local people. It is generally doing well in these areas. The district is clean, attractive and

safe. Residents' satisfaction with the value for money they get from the Council is higher than the national average. They generally enjoy a good quality of life in friendly communities. Effective support is being provided to the local economy. The needs of the important tourism industry are carefully balanced against making sure that the environment is protected. The Council has taken a strong local and national lead in highlighting and tackling problems caused by coastal erosion. However, it is failing in the key area of ensuring that there are enough homes, particularly affordable ones, to meet local needs now and in the future. It has been slow at getting empty homes back into use. People who need changes made to their homes to help them to live more independently have to wait too long. Some services, such as recreation and leisure, are affected by comparatively low levels of staffing. This has been made worse by the high levels of staff sickness, although this is now improving.

The Council scores 3 out of 4 for Use of Resources. This is because it effectively manages the money it has to spend to deliver its services. Information about its finances can be viewed by the public. Budgets are carefully monitored and enough money is held in reserve. But the Council needs to do more to compare the costs of its services to those of other councils to make sure it is getting good value for money for local people.

The Council is generally well organised, although it needs to make sure that the information it produces is accurate. It also needs to strengthen the management of the contracts through which it purchases goods and services, It is looking at its partnerships to make sure that they are working effectively.

Staff are well trained and the Council has no difficulty in recruiting, Staff surveys show that staff feel happy with the information they receive and that they understand the reasons for change. The vast majority of staff also see the Council as an equal opportunities employer and do not feel disadvantaged or discriminated against. However, capacity is stretched and there are still comparatively high levels of absence due to sickness. But this is decreasing.

## About North Norfolk District Council

North Norfolk is a rural district on the East Anglian coast. It includes a large portion of the Norfolk Broads. Most people live in small market towns and seaside resorts including North Walsham, Cromer, Fakenham, Holt, Sheringham, Stalham and Wells-next-the-Sea. There are problems with flooding and with coastal erosion. Over 100,000 people live in North Norfolk and this number is expected to grow over the next ten years at about the same rate as in the rest of England. The total number of people from ethnic minority groups is only a small proportion of the district's population. People living in the district generally enjoy better health than average with nearly a third of them being over the retirement age. The proportion of older people is expected to grow, and at a quicker rate than elsewhere over the next 20 years.

Levels of wealth and poverty have been similar to those in the country as a whole, but in recent years the district has been falling behind with more people becoming less well off. The main areas of deprivation are part of Cromer, some rural areas and some parts of North Walsham. The number of people out of work is lower than elsewhere, but people also earn less than

average. Tourism provides a lot of the employment and there is also some manufacturing. There are many second homes. Houses generally cost more than average making them unaffordable for many local people.

There are 48 elected councillors representing the 34 areas into which North Norfolk is divided. The Liberal Democrats group is in charge of the Council.

The Council is committed to making sure that local people enjoy a high quality of life and that the beautiful North Norfolk environment is looked after. This is summed up in its priorities which are:

Active and sustainable communities: with good quality affordable housing, employment and training opportunities and a variety of recreational and cultural activities, and communities that are safe, confident and involved

Natural environment and built heritage: protecting the historical architecture and archaeological sites, looking after the environment and balancing this with the demands of tourism, tackling the challenges of coastal erosion and a clean and pollution free district.

To achieve these aims the Council commits itself to first class management of its resources, providing excellent services and the best outcomes for the district.

## Organisational assessment

The progress the Council has made against its priorities is as follows:

### Active and sustainable communities

#### Housing

The Council has not succeeded in making sure that enough homes are being built to meet current and future needs. The growth in the number of second homes on the North Norfolk coast increases the problem. People in need of an affordable home find it difficult to get one. There has been slow progress in tackling the issue of empty homes. In recent years, compared to other Norfolk councils, a high number of homes, over 800, have stood empty for more than six months. Councils have been given powers to make sure that these homes are made available, but North Norfolk is only trying to bring two back into use this year. Almost half of the 800 are on two former RAF bases and there have been delays in getting them released for possible reuse.

While the economic recession has made house building difficult, compared with others North Norfolk has not built many affordable homes. Prospects look bleak for the coming year with only 32 expected to be built against a target of 100. Unlike other councils, North Norfolk has been unsuccessful in attempts to increase the number of affordable homes, for example by encouraging homes that could not be sold to be changed into affordable rented housing.

The Council has put effort into helping people to avoid becoming homeless,

with 135 households receiving effective support in 2008/09. Temporary accommodation for people needing re-homing consists of self contained independent flats owned by the Council or by its social housing partners. The target time for moving people into permanent homes is far too long at over six months, although currently the Council is managing to re-house people in about five months.

People have been helped to adapt their homes so that they can live in them more easily, but are having to wait too long for these adaptations.

The housing benefits service has become quicker and more efficient. The Council has increased its capacity through extra funding and staff training so that a supportive service can be provided now and in the future.

## Employment and training opportunities

The Council plays a leading role in ensuring that learning and skills guidance is available to local people. It is providing effective support to people affected by the recession. Advice, for example about training opportunities, has been provided to people who are unemployed or facing redundancy and 76 were helped to find a job in 2008/09. The Council has given support and advice to local businesses that have had to reduce in size, or that are in danger of closure. It has helped 72 businesses to keep, or increase, the number of jobs they offer and 52 new businesses started in 2007/08. It has also supported new sources of employment such as the prison being built on the former RAF Coltishall site. This will provide 400 jobs.

## Recreational and cultural activities

More, and less expensive, recreational and cultural activities are being provided. Four new play areas have been provided. There is more choice for young people and greater provision for team sports. People have been making more use of the mobile gym and the three sports centres on school sites, but the level of use of the three leisure centres has been declining. The Council is discussing this with its leisure contractor. More people have been taking part in events at Holt Country Park and Bacton Woods, although fewer events have taken place than planned, due to staff not being available. The number of visits to local museums increased more than expected.

## Safe, confident and involved communities

The Council and its partners have been effective in protecting and improving the quality of life in North Norfolk. Local people are increasingly satisfied with the district as a place in which to live. The low levels of crime have further reduced. In 2008/09 there was 16 per cent less recorded crime than in 2007/08. Local people feel comparatively unconcerned about crime and anti-social behaviour, although a quarter of them are unsure how effectively this is tackled by the police and the Council. Former temporary accommodation has been converted into an eight unit refuge, providing safe, supported accommodation for victims of domestic violence. Nearly two thirds of residents who were asked don't feel that parents are taking enough responsibility for their children's behaviour. However there is less concern than elsewhere about drunk and rowdy behaviour and drugs being problems.

The Council has been slow to ensure that different groups of people can easily use its services, but has been working hard on this. The Council's staff is amongst the best in terms of reflecting the ethnic mix of the local community. Eight out of ten residents feel that they are treated with respect and consideration by their local public services. This is slightly higher than elsewhere. The Council is also giving a stronger lead to the community by encouraging good relations between different groups. It has been one of the best in taking further action on any reported racial incidents. Also, by making sure that local people are well informed, and by being ready to listen, it has catered well for different groups. For example two sites for gypsy and traveller families have been identified, with few objections being raised. Most North Norfolk residents feel that people are getting better at treating each other with respect and that people from different backgrounds get on well together.

More people are being encouraged to get involved in their communities. For example, through North Norfolk Youth Voice, young people aged 14 to 21 are given the chance to let councillors know what they think. They are able to get involved in things that matter to them, for example they are running information sessions for young people about sexual health. North Norfolk people are more convinced than people in similar areas that they can influence decisions affecting where they live. They are more ready to get involved in local decision making. However, although slightly above the Norfolk average, there is less of a feeling of belonging to their neighbourhood than people have in other similar rural areas and fewer do voluntary work than elsewhere.

## Natural environment and built heritage

### Historical architecture and archaeological sites

The Council is effectively looking after the historic buildings that help make the area so attractive to tourists. Plans carefully protect the appearance of the market towns. Listed buildings and other buildings of historic value, as well as archaeological sites, are protected. Work to improve the appearance of Cromer included grants so that residents could improve and restore the older buildings within the town centre. The Council is now working in Wells with local groups, such as the town council, to create a new museum and cultural centre based on the Maltings Community Centre and the historic Sackhouse.

### Environment and tourism

Tourism is important to the North Norfolk economy and the Council strikes a careful balance between supporting the tourism industry and protecting the natural environment. All councils have to produce plans showing where they will allow more houses and industrial buildings and how the natural environment will be protected. North Norfolk has a good plan in place to develop tourism in a way that uses the natural beauty of the area without damaging it, for example by encouraging walking and cycling. The new tourist information centre in Cromer is an example of how the Council invests in tourism. It provides public toilets and car parks and makes sure that parks, public gardens, beaches and other public spaces are well looked after.

## Coastal erosion

The Council has played a strong leadership role in coastal protection which is an increasing local priority. Large lengths of the North Norfolk coastline including many local communities are unlikely to be around in the next 50 - 100 years, unless all relevant organisations and agencies can work together to sort this out. The Council has been working closely with local people, other councils and national organisations, including government departments to try to find a better way of managing coastal change. The Council has produced its own plans to manage the issues identified in the Environment Agency plans. It has tried to put a cost to the loss of local houses, businesses, and community facilities, so that the full impact of doing nothing can be seen. It has altered its planning rules to allow businesses, such as caravan parks, to relocate away from the cliff top onto a site further inland. It also wants to help local villages survive and prosper. This means allowing planned growth such as new affordable homes for young families to live in.

## A clean and pollution free district

North Norfolk people value their local environment and the Council is good at keeping the district clean. It is the overall winner of the 2009 Clean Britain Awards. There is very little litter, graffiti or fly-tipping. The Council is good at dealing with household rubbish. It has kept the cost of waste collection low and is amongst the best at recycling. Over 47 per cent of the household rubbish collected in 2008/09 was recycled. There is slightly less rubbish being collected from North Norfolk homes, although they still produce more than average.

Pollution levels are low. Air quality in North Norfolk is generally good and is carefully monitored. The four main tourist beaches all have Blue Flags because they are kept clean and in good condition. The Council is leading by example through raising its staff's awareness of how to save energy and reduce pollution. Council plans make sure that pollution caused by future building in the area is kept to a minimum and there is a positive approach to renewable forms of energy. An annual GreenBuild event promotes care of the environment and attracts over 4,000 visitors.

The Council has plans to improve services in place, with enough money to deliver them, but shortage of staff in some areas may make it difficult to make sure these improvements happen. The Council is quite 'lean' in terms of the number of staff it has, and for a long time there have been problems with high levels of staff sickness. The Council has put effort into tackling this, and last year the number of days lost due to staff being off sick reduced. But it is still comparatively high and this could mean that some parts of the Council's services cannot be provided.

Some of the targets that the Council sets itself are not very challenging. The recession is clearly affecting local people and businesses and the Council has services that provide help and advice. Last year it had a target of providing advice and guidance to 100 unemployed people. It actually helped 157 people, but only set a target for this year of helping a further 100. By the end of June it had already helped 100 people and there will be more who need this support. Similarly, the Council again aimed to support the same number

of businesses (30) to keep or increase the jobs they could offer, but 52 were helped in 2008/09 and 15 were helped by the end of June this year. If the Council loses a lot of work time through people being off sick and some targets are rather low, it will not improve the lives of North Norfolk people as much as it should.



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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