

South Kesteven District Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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of local public services

South Kesteven District Council

Overall, South Kesteven District Council performs adequately

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

South Kesteven District Council performs adequately overall. A recent survey showed that 43 per cent of residents were satisfied with the Council, slightly below the national average. The Council is tackling issues that local people recognise as priorities. These are the speedy processing of benefits, repairs to the Council houses, waste collection and recycling, providing affordable homes and taking action to improve the energy usage in homes. Councillors and staff work well together and the Council controls its money effectively to improve services. But initiatives to reduce anti social behaviour have yet to convince enough people that the problem is reducing, and progress to revitalise town centres has not met expectations.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. It is committed to providing services in the way people want and is carrying out a programme of reviews to achieve this. The time taken to process new benefit claims is now cut to 14 days, at a time when the number of people making claims has risen. The time taken to complete housing repairs has been reduced and homes have been improved. Vulnerable people can access advice in their own homes. There are things the Council could do better, like answering telephones more quickly, improving consultation so that all Council services understand their customers and their aspirations. The Planning service needs to improve further so it can play a key role in the Council's regeneration priorities.

The carbon footprint of South Kesteven District Council is the highest of all districts in Lincolnshire. The steps being taken to reduce this are commendable with early success in transport and in reducing the energy consumption in people's homes. Waste collection and recycling is now among

the best in the country.

More than 4 in 5 residents think that people get on well together and think the area is a good place to live. This is above the average of Lincolnshire.

The Council works well with other organisations. As part of the Lincolnshire Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, it shares some services with other authorities and is a leader in using efficiency reviews to improve service and reduce cost. It works with health services to reduce inequalities and with the Police to reduce anti-social behaviour.

The Council has had success in assisting businesses to grow and invest locally and facilitated finding jobs for 150 people after Fenland Foods closed down. It has paid most local suppliers promptly.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for Use of Resources. It manages the money it has to spend well and has very low costs in any comparison with other councils. It recognises that cost alone is not the criteria for assessing value for money. Higher cost areas are quickly scrutinised to ensure they are understood and in line with performance and satisfaction expectations. Good practice is not yet adopted across all Council services. People can find information in the Council magazine 'SKtoday' and on the Council website.

The Council has made sure that councillors and staff are held responsible for the money they control. There are regular council meetings where councillors oversee budgets, and make sure that councillors and staff are behaving properly, for example in awarding contracts or claiming expenses. Before the Council starts new activities, or changes existing ones, it checks to see if things can be done differently to save money.

There have been a number of changes in senior management over recent years and a new Chief Executive has recently been appointed. There is good team working amongst the senior managers and this is expected to continue under the new leadership. The Council is about to embark on major regeneration projects of a larger scale than previously attempted and it understands that it will have to bring in new skills to supplement the existing team.

About South Kesteven District Council

South Kesteven is a large rural district in the south of Lincolnshire in the East Midlands. There is a mix of urban and rural communities in the district with the four main towns of Grantham, Stamford, Bourne and the Deepings and over 80 villages. Grantham has been identified as an area of key growth by the government. The population is around 131,000 and generally older than the national average. This older population is expected to grow at a higher rate than the national average over the next twenty years. The majority of the population are of white ethnic backgrounds. The area is relatively affluent and has become relatively more affluent in recent years. The economy is based around manufacturing, distribution and hospitality.

Unemployment is low and earnings for those who live in South Kesteven are higher than average, although earnings for those who work in the district are

lower. House prices are above the Lincolnshire and East Midlands averages but below the national average. The health of people in South Kesteven is generally better than the England average, however there are inequalities in health in the district by gender and level of deprivation.

The priorities of South Kesteven District Council are:

Customer First

Quality Living

Good for Business

Quality Organisation

Organisational assessment

Customer First

Services are being redesigned to ensure they are customer focused. This involves a range of staff, councillors and members of the public. Waste and duplication are eliminated resulting in an increase in a faster service and cost savings. For example, at a time when the number of new people claiming benefit has risen by 30 per cent, the time to process claims has improved from 25 days to 14 days. New residents now have a council tax bill issued within 2 days of notification. Building on the success of the review of benefits, the same principles were applied to housing repairs. Already this has resulted in a 60 per cent reduction in the time taken to carry out repairs and a 50 per cent increase in tradesmen productivity.

Telephone answering is also improving with 94 per cent of calls to the customer service centre being answered. All calls across the Council answered within the target time, improved by 5 per cent to 79 per cent in 2009/10 to date. However the target time set of 28 seconds to answer telephone calls through the switchboard is not challenging.

Although in 2008/09 only 64 per cent of casual callers were seen within ten minutes of arrival at the customer service centre in Grantham, this included people seeing a benefits assessor. In 2009/10 a new appointment system was introduced for benefit enquiries and now 93 per cent of casual callers to the customer service centre are being seen within target times. Joint customer access points have been set up with partners in Bourne and Stamford. Vulnerable people have access to floating support whereby advice can be given in their homes. Advice is available on a number of issues such as accommodation issues, individual living skills, budgeting and debt.

Currently 72 per cent of people are satisfied with the Council web site and 74 per cent found what they were looking for. It is currently being re-designed to improve on-line transactions and self service options.

Quality Living

South Kesteven District Council has improved recycling with 51 per cent of waste now being recycled. This puts it in the top 10 per cent of councils. The total waste sent to landfill at 418kg was 34kg lower than last year, which is also in the top 10 per cent of councils nationally. Streets are clean.

The Council takes climate change seriously and has a carbon management plan and identified its carbon footprint, and put plans in place to reduce it. A programme is already underway to refresh the Council car fleet, using smaller and more fuel efficient cars. Anticipated savings over 5 years are £186,000 with a 20 per cent reduction in fuel emissions. Refuse collection rounds are going to be reviewed to ensure they are efficient and emissions reduced.

Over £1.3 million was spent in 2008/09 on making private sector homes both warmer and more fuel efficient. As part of improving the Council housing stock, improvements to roofing and loft insulation reduced heating bills resulting in half a tonne of CO₂ being saved per household. Warm Front grants were given to nearly 700 households and covered over 260 new boilers, 39 gas central heating systems, 15 oil central heating systems, over 100 cavity wall insulations, nearly 280 loft insulations, 29 hot water tank jackets, 89 draft proofing and 581 energy efficient light bulb packs.

Forward plans include improving heating and lighting at the Council headquarters, to reduce energy costs and reduce emissions. Also to work with other Lincolnshire authorities and the Carbon Trust to further refine the Carbon Management Plan supported by regional funding. A study of wildlife sites is being commissioned to improve the council's understanding of biodiversity.

The Council provided 289 affordable homes in 2008/09, nearly double the target and the number provided in the previous year. Acquisitions from developers have ensured the Council is ahead of target in 2009/10. The number of households living in temporary accommodation, at 54 in 2008/09, was below the target of 75 and improvement has continued into 2009/10 to date with 31 households in temporary accommodation. The Council is completing a 100 per cent stock condition survey of its housing which will help it continue to improve its properties and ensure they meet the decent homes standard.

In South Kesteven violent crime and serious acquisitive crime is down on the previous year whereas there has been a 35 per cent increase in assault with injury compared to the similar quarter last year. The Police, through the Community Safety Partnership, have developed a plan to reduce the problem.

The 2008 survey of residents of South Kesteven shows that it is in the lowest 25 per cent of Councils where the Police and other agencies are seen as successfully dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime. They don't think the Police and Council seek out their views. In contrast the Council and Police have been proactive in taking initiatives to counteract anti-social behaviour. The 'Prison Me No Way' initiative involved interactive classes on anti social behaviour delivered to 250 pupils across two secondary schools. It covered the impacts of drugs, alcohol, knives and the Internet while making the attendees aware of the implications of the Criminal Justice system and prison life. Forty young people involved in anti social behaviour or being identified by partner agencies as being at risk of getting involved took part in a forces based team building, self confidence and respect event. Ninety young people in a high risk

group of offending were involved in a football programme run by South Kesteven District Council with other partner agencies being actively involved. The impacts of substance abuse on individuals and their families, was explained to over 240 young people. Initiatives by the Council and Police are not yet recognised by the public as being successful.

Good for Business

Over the past five years the Council has set out to deliver economic development by assisting businesses to grow and invest locally. It has also aimed to develop the vitality of its four major town centres. Business support and development, and enterprise and inward investment is good. Businesses are positive about the district as a place for doing business, and about the Council's role. Quick action by the Council, following the closure of Fenland Foods, resulted in 150 people finding jobs with other local firms. The Council has also recognised the impact the recession can have on local suppliers and has paid 73 per cent of invoices from them within seven days of receipt.

The scale of town centre improvement sought has not yet been achieved. There has been step-by-step rather than comprehensive redevelopment, in the district's town centres. Public satisfaction with town centres is generally fair but the public has not had the same influence as business and retail community on the proposed changes.

Good progress has been made in getting to grip with Grantham for Growth and Bourne town centre 'core area' initial tasks. Funding to acquire sites in Bourne has been provided and the Council currently owns 35 per cent of the ground required. Much of the proposed activity has not yet reached the detailed planning stage or resulted in concrete commitments from public and private sector partners. Further delays may result since Planning is seen by the Council as an area where it needs to improve performance, both in relation to the speed applications are determined, but also in relation to appeals. A customer focused review is scheduled for later in the year.

The challenging ambitions for the medium to long term are on a much larger scale than previously attempted in an area where the Council does not have a track record of success. The scale of the ambition is recognised by the Council and it is responding to the need for greater breadth and depth of experience by changing the way they work, reallocating funding and bringing in new skills to supplement good team leadership.

A new £4.3 million business and innovation centre is currently being built in Market Deeping and is expected to have a positive impact on job prospects in the area.

Quality Organisation

The Council has adopted a sound methodology to improve efficiency, reduce waste and improve the experience for customers. It has proved successful in speeding the processing of benefits applications and has improved the time taken to fully complete housing repairs where operatives have been given more responsibility to complete work to the satisfaction of the tenant. The

average time to complete all repairs is down to 3.8 days with further improvement expected following changes to the computer system for work allocation.

Consultation by the Council has been inconsistent between services as highlighted in a number of Audit Commission reports. The needs and views of residents were not always available. The Council has responded and a Consultation Strategy and toolkit was adopted in October 2008 for use across the Council. The new approach is already making a difference since, following the recent tenant's survey, the Council reacted promptly to install induction loops in offices and vans.

The Council strives to make good use of resources and costs are lower than those of most councils but an understanding of the factors influencing costs has not been extended across the whole Council. Notable achievement in 2008/09 was that the cost of waste collection was lower by £1.68 per household and the service was improved.

The rate of sickness absence rose to 10.26 days per employee in 2008/09, 2.26 days above target. Positive action by officers has resulted in a reduction to 8.61 days in early 2009/10.

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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Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ
Telephone: 0844 798 1212
Fax: 0844 798 2945
Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946
www.audit-commission.gov.uk



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