

East Devon District Council

Organisational Assessment

Dated 9 December 2009



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of local public services

East Devon District Council

Overall, East Devon District Council performs adequately

Managing performance	2 out of 4
Use of resources	2 out of 4
Managing finances	2 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

East Devon District Council is performing adequately. The Council is tackling issues that local people recognise as priorities. These are reducing crime, making the area a clean place to live and bringing in jobs. It was less successful in delivering affordable homes and improving recycling. The Council sets low council tax and looks after its money carefully. Local people's satisfaction with the Council is higher than in most other areas. The Council recognises it can do more to provide services that are easy to use by everyone such as people in remote areas and gypsies and travellers.

The council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. Streets are clean and tidy, free from litter, graffiti and fly-tipping. The number of people who are homeless has fallen and council homes for local people are not empty for as long as they used to be. Satisfaction of people living in council homes in East Devon is among the best in the country (10th out of 355). Tenants believe they get good value for money. Waste going to landfill is reducing and recycling slowly improving. The Council is helping people, particularly youngsters to have healthy lifestyles. It is improving leisure centres and providing new play parks for children. The Council supported people financially after the Ottery St Mary flooding.

People who need to claim benefits receive a fair service from the Council. The council has improved its speed of paying claims and achieves good value for money. But it recognises it can improve how it meets customers' needs. The Council was well short of its targets for providing homes that are affordable to buy or rent for people on low incomes. But performance is set to improve this year. The Council has done well to keep the proposed housing development at Cranbrook on track. The Council recycles more waste than it did but its

performance is still below average.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for value for money. Many, but not all, of the Council's services are better than average and low cost. The Council looks after its money carefully and has built up large reserves. It is beginning to explore opportunities to share services with other councils to save money. The Council does not routinely measure quality and costs of services together. This means it cannot be sure it gets value for money in all services.

The number of working days lost to staff sickness increased in 2008/09.

About East Devon District Council

East Devon is the largest district in Devon. It has a population of 132,300. The district's size means that people are spread thinly, mainly in rural areas. The main towns are Exmouth, Sidmouth, Seaton and Honiton. There are areas of outstanding natural beauty and the coastline is a world heritage site.

The proportion of older people is high and this is set to increase further by 2029. Unemployment is relatively low and although wages across the district are below average, house prices remain high. People's health is generally better than the average for England.

The Council is led by the Conservatives, and has seven priorities. These are:

1. Affordable homes
2. Thriving economy
3. Safe, clean and green environment
4. Recycling
5. Children and Young People
6. Excellent service for our customers
7. An inspirational Council

Organisational assessment

Affordable homes

Local people are concerned that house prices are not affordable. There are many second homes in the area which pushes house prices up. This means young people in particular often cannot afford to buy a house in their local area and have to leave. The Council understands this and works hard to help local developers build new homes that people can afford to buy or rent. The Council's focus, rightly, has been on keeping the new housing development at Cranbrook on track. This has been difficult in the recession. The Council has provided financial support to developers to keep the project going. As a result

1,000 new homes, 300 affordable, will be built by 2011. The complete scheme is for 7,500 new homes in five or six years time. Over 2000 of these will be affordable to buy or rent for people on low incomes. Last year the Council only helped deliver nine homes but is on the way to 160 in 2009/10

The Council has made good progress in helping homeless people in the District. The numbers of homeless people and the use of temporary accommodation during the last 12 months have fallen.

The time Council homes stand empty has fallen significantly over the last two years and there are good plans in place to cut this time further. Council house tenants are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service and value for money they get. The Council is the tenth best in the country for the results it received in the last national survey of council house tenants. The Council has spent money over the years to keep its houses in a good condition. All houses now meet government standards to be called decent.

Thriving economy

The Council continues to work hard in meeting its goal for creating a thriving economy. It has secured nearly £7million of government money to support the Cranbrook development. This money is for building a new railway station and for improvements to M5 Junction 29 - both in the Cranbrook area. The Council has been working hard with other agencies like Exeter and Devon Councils and government to make sure all key services such as roads, shops, health and water will be in place when houses at Cranbrook are built. This will be particularly important in bringing construction jobs into the area. It will also help in bringing forward the further developments of Skypark Business District, rail freight developments, expansion of Exeter International Airport and Exeter Science Park.

Safe, clean and green environment

The Council is better than most others at keeping its streets clean. It is in the best performing councils at removing litter and dealing with fly tipping, graffiti and abandoned vehicles. Satisfaction of local people with the area is good. The Council works well to provide services that meet local needs. The Council provides a REACT team (Respond Enforce and Clean Team). This service works with town and parish councils to keep areas clean and safe. It carries out sweeping, litter-picking, cleaning and undertakes minor repairs. In a few cases the Council has started to fine people for littering.

The Council works well in partnership with the police to keep the district safe and reduce crime. Crime continues to fall in the area and people feel safer. People now see rowdy and anti-social behaviour as less of a problem than two years ago. There is a good Crime Reduction and Disorder Partnership in place that addresses local issues and is cutting levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. There are also action groups tackling domestic violence, and drug and alcohol issues. But, Exmouth is a crime hot spot and extra CCTV is now available in the town centre.

The Council helped local people when flooding in Ottery St Mary damaged homes. It matched public donations with its own money to collect £25,000. It

then gave financial help to less well off people who were affected. It has worked with the Environment Agency to build flood defences to help prevent problems in the future.

The Council is working to reduce Carbon emissions that cause global warming in the district. It gives grants and advice to people to reduce energy in their own homes. It is investing money into energy efficient measures in council homes. The Council is working with developers and environment and government agencies to make the new houses at Cranbrook as energy efficient as possible. It hopes to create a “zero-carbon” development - so there would be no emissions damaging the environment from the 7500 houses.

Recycling

The recycling service has improved over the last 12 months but is still below what other councils achieve. The Council recycled 26 per cent of household waste in 2008/09. The Council has since introduced a new recycling and refuse service to Axminster, Seaton and Beer. Two fifths of the district now receives kerbside recycling collections and the recycling rate has risen to 31% so far this year. But the government’s national recycling target for 2010 is 40 per cent and other councils in Devon manage more than 50 per cent. The Council needs to speed up the roll out of its kerbside recycling collection to the whole district.

The Council is providing extra support to people who need it to recycle. For example, it gives extra help to the elderly and disabled. It is also supplying a refuse collection and recycling service to some gypsies and travellers in the district.

Children and young people

The Council is improving services for young people. There is a dedicated support worker to help them and as a result the number of homeless young people is lower now than in the past.

The Council is improving play for children and has installed four multiuse games areas in rural communities throughout East Devon. It is improving its leisure services through investment in sport which will make sure there is equal access to leisure. There are good projects called ‘off the Sofa dayz’ which encourage children and young people to get out of their houses and play sports.

The Council is working in partnership to develop learning and skills of local people with the support of SWRDA and the Learning Skills Council. The aim is to help young people become more skilled and get better paying jobs. There is a new Employment and Skills Board for Exeter and East Devon which works to develop people’s skills that employers need. Hopes for new jobs are linked to the major projects planned such as the Science Park and Flyby academy.

Excellent service for customers and inspirational council

East Devon District Council is improving the way it supports local people. Its Environmental Health Service has received the government's Customer Service Excellence award. To get this it had to show high levels of satisfaction from local people as well as a service that meets people's needs and makes a difference. Also the service gained the Noise Abatement Society Enterprise award for dealing with noise and anti-social behaviour.

The Council has made it easier for people to use its housing service. It has opened an office in Exmouth and started making home visits to people who cannot make their way to the council's offices. Staff from the service now provide housing related support to elderly tenants in sheltered housing. The planning service is reducing its backlog of applications and is processing applications more quickly. It now offers free pre-application advice.

The Council is supporting vulnerable people - such as less well off, ill, elderly or disabled people - in many ways. During the recession it has increased the advice and support for people who have concerns over their money. It is helping residents who have difficulty paying their council tax bills. It has also introduced a rent deposit scheme to help people who need a house but cannot afford a deposit and rent in advance. The Council is developing its website to improve access to information. More services are now available through the internet, which reduces the need for people to visit council offices. A panel of local people is reviewing the website regularly to make sure it is user-friendly.

The Council has a good understanding of what matters to local people and their needs. It also understands the impact that this has on costs and how well residents can get the services they need. It communicates well with local people. It has set up neighbourhood assessments which invite local people to comment on their services and what they think is important. It also invites residents to speak at some committee meetings. People in East Devon are more satisfied than most with the area as a place to live.

The Council has good managerial and councillor leadership. Staff training is good and links to the Council's priorities. This includes training on service excellence, management, people's well-being, domestic violence and equality and diversity. Managers and councillors have good training programmes and feel more confident to manage and carry out their roles for the benefit of the community.

The Council achieves adequate value for money. Many of its services are better than average and costs are generally lower than elsewhere. Managers and councillors receive good reports on performance and check these carefully. It carries out a programme of service reviews in which senior managers and councillors check quality and costs. They challenge officers to make sure services are good enough and meet local people's needs. As a result it has identified some good services such as planning and housing benefits and improved these.

But the Council does not routinely consider performance and cost of all services and so cannot show that it achieves value for money consistently across all service areas. It is starting to address this. The Council is starting to

think about how it might share services such as housing benefits with other councils to save money. It has a shared equalities officer with Mid Devon District Council. The Council recognises that the quality of internal audit - the way the Council monitors its money and that rules are followed - is a concern. The Council knows that staff sickness levels are too high and now monitors this in more depth. The Council is working to identify and tackle common causes of absence. For example, the Council now offers free physiotherapy for staff with back and neck problems.

Councils will be able to save more money for the taxpayer in the future when they know what the final local government structure will be across Devon. They can then work even more closely together by sharing information, staff and services.

The Council also acknowledges that it does not have a complete understanding of the various sections of its community. For example it has not yet considered fully how it can make services easier to use by minority and vulnerable groups - such as migrant workers from Eastern Europe, black and minority ethnic groups or the disabled. It can also do more to help people in more remote parts of the District get in touch with the Council and its services.

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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