

9 December 2009

## **NORTH DORSET IS PERFORMING WELL**

According to the latest Government assessment North Dorset District Council is performing well. Its three main priorities are clear and well understood, it has a good track record in delivering against those priorities and it looks as if it will continue to improve in the future.

This is the opinion of the Audit Commission which carried out the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) for Dorset earlier this year and announced the results on its Oneplace website on Wednesday 9 December. The commission has praised North Dorset as the best performing district in Dorset.

Cllr Peter Webb, Leader of the Council, said: "I'm delighted with the Audit Commission's report because it endorses what we have been working at so consistently for the last three years. This Council has been placed in an exceptionally difficult and unfair financial environment over the last four years but this assessment shows that we have made the right decisions from that position. It is a credit to all Elected Members and Officers alike and also to our active partners in towns, parishes and local community partnerships."

The Council delivers good value for money and customer satisfaction levels are in line with what it spends on its services. The Council is clear what services are most important to local people and it makes sure that it focuses on those.

Liz Goodall, Chief Executive at North Dorset, said: "Two years ago we had an encouraging report from the Audit Commission and now this assessment proves that the plans we had in place then have continued to work well for the benefit of our communities."

The Audit Commission report states: 'Leadership of the Council is good. Councillors are good leaders. They know a lot about their communities and work well with council officers. The Council has long standing effective arrangements for talking to local people about things that matter to them. Four Area Partnerships based on the main towns mean that local people can influence Council thinking and decide how some of the Council's money is spent. The Council also has good information on the changing population and businesses in the area. It uses this to plan its services with local people. The Council does well in bringing public, voluntary and community organisations together.'

- more follows -

## **North Dorset is performing well** continued ...

Fifteen per cent fewer employees (over three years) at the Council are now doing more but staff morale remains high. As a result the Council has made significant savings over the past three years and has done well to balance its budget and saved over £2 million a year through a tough programme of service reviews.

The Audit Commission report also identified some service areas for improvement: revenues and benefits, housing, and planning are low volume with higher than average costs. These services have not yet shown steady improvement and need to be addressed.

Dorset as a whole has been criticised for not providing enough housing, particularly affordable housing. However, North Dorset is in the top 25% of all councils in England for providing new affordable housing for local people. A recent housing stock survey showed that the Council is improving the quality of its housing.

'Safe and Secure' grants and 'Affordable Warmth' Grants help people to have efficient heating and thermal insulation in their homes. 'Warm Front Top-up' grants mean that low income households can use schemes that help save energy more cheaply.

The Council has also improved complaints handling and delivers Disabled Facilities Grants for home adaptations more quickly. A successful Council campaign to raise awareness about the help available doubled the numbers of people who asked for help.

The Council continues to make it easier for local people to use its services. It has longer opening hours and answers questions and complaints more quickly. More money has been put into services, such as claiming benefit, which more people are using. The Council wants to keep providing a good service for local people. For example, there are more shops and post offices where people can pay for Council services. This is very important in rural areas.

Most people feel that they are being treated fairly in the delivery of Council services.

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**For more information contact: Cllr Peter Webb, Leader of North Dorset District Council on 01258 454111 or the Communications Manager on 01258 484100.**