

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 HOURS THURSDAY 16/08/07

Improved planning service for Suffolk Coastal residents

The planning service provided by Suffolk Coastal District Council is 'good' with 'promising prospects for improvement' according to an independent report released today by the Audit Commission.

On a scale from zero to three stars the Audit Commission inspection team gave the service a 'good' two star rating. This was because it has been improving well in key areas since the last inspection three years ago. The service continues to provide good results that meet public and government expectations while preserving and enhancing the district environment.

Edwina Child, Audit Commission senior manager, said :

"Suffolk Coastal has improved those parts of the service where it was not performing well in the past. As a consequence the planning service is now serving local people well. The service is helping to maintain the character of the area whilst at the same time promoting new housing and employment opportunities. However, further work is needed to ensure the service is really focussed on what customers want."

Strengths include:

- A good range of planning advice is on offer to customers
- The service is effective in most cases when consulting and engaging with customers
- The speed of dealing with all types of planning applications has improved over the last eighteen months
- The service provides good value for money in relation to the quality of service and outcomes it delivers

Areas for improvement include:

- Standards need to be used more effectively so customers know what they can expect from the service
- Feedback from customers and other stakeholders does not always result in service improvements

To help the service improve, inspectors made a number of recommendations. These include:

- Further developing the use of service standards for customers
- Improving the customer focus of the planning service
- Continuing to improve the use of information and communications technology

The service under review consisted of development control, planning enforcement and planning policy (including conservation). Expenditure for the service in 2007/08 is £1.81 million and it employs 34.4 FTE staff. The Council received 2,239 planning applications and 360 enforcement cases during 2006/07.

Copies of the report are available from Suffolk Coastal District Council or from the Audit Commission website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

2. As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

3. For further information about the Audit Commission, visit our website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR FOR AN EMBARGOED COPY OF THE FULL REPORT
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