Northumberland

Area Assessment (Summary version)

Dated 9 December 2009

oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

Northumberland at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Northumberland. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from

No green flags have been identified for Northumberland

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

No red flags have been identified for Northumberland

The local area

Northumberland is one of the largest counties in the North East of England but, one of the least densely populated with 300,000 residents. The number of people who are 65 and older is increasing. Black and minority ethnic residents (BME) account for about one in 30 of the population, many of whom are migrant workers from Eastern Europe.

Parts of Northumberland, such as Morpeth and Ponteland are prosperous commuter towns for Tyneside. The county boasts a beautiful environment including the National Park and the Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But over one-third of the population live in some of the most deprived areas in England. There are big differences between the sparse rural areas of the north and west and the old coal mining towns of the south-east. It's here that the levels of deprivation are worst.

In April 2009 Northumberland County Council took on the responsibilities of the former district councils. At the same time the Northumberland Strategic Partnership was reviewed to make sure it was able to take full advantage of the opportunities that having one council for the whole county could bring.

Northumberland's public services have agreed the following challenges that

they need to tackle:

To maintain and improve the economic growth and performance of the county whilst ensuring that all residents can share in high living standards

To create sustainable communities-places that offer everyone a decent home that they can afford in a quality environment in which they want to live, now and in the future

To promote well being and reduce health inequality, particularly in supporting those people who feel more vulnerable or who are at risk

To ensure that our communities have confidence in their capacity to bring about beneficial change and, by doing so, maintain and further develop a shared sense of belonging, pride and respect

The next section tells you how Northumberland's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

How is Northumberland doing?

To maintain and improve the economic growth and performance of the county whilst ensuring that all residents can share in high living standards

Before the current recession, Northumberland's economy was doing well. In many ways it is holding up better than in other parts of the region. The Northumberland Strategic Partnership, bringing together public, private and voluntary sector partners, has worked hard and successfully over the years to stimulate enterprise and jobs in the local economy, particularly in the south-east of the county. For example, the work of 'Go Wansbeck' and the South East Northumberland and North Tyneside Regeneration Initiative has made a big impact on their areas.

Partners have been taking positive steps to try to limit the negative effects of the recession on Northumberland people. This has included supporting businesses and taking steps to reduce fuel poverty.

Educational standards of both seven year olds and sixteen year olds are above national averages. A high proportion of Northumberland schools are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted. But attainment needs to improve further. Eleven year olds don't do well enough, given the above average achievement of children when they start school. Educational attainment varies too much across the county – the gap between the most deprived pupils (those who have free school meals) and the rest is wider than the national average.

Partners have been very successful in reducing the proportion of 16 to18 year olds not in education, employment or training. It has gone down from 10 per cent to just over six per cent over the last two years.

To create sustainable communities-places that offer everyone a decent home that they can afford in a quality environment in which they want to live, now and in the future

Housing services for some Northumberland residents are not good enough, but the new council is making some progress in improving them. It is giving the right priority to improving housing services and doing the right things, but it is too early to see the impact of many of the new initiatives. Much private sector housing is poor and the number of empty homes is growing. There are too few homes that people on lower incomes can afford to buy, but the Council is working closely with developers to build more affordable housing. Housing support services for some vulnerable people have often been weak in the past, but there are now new schemes to help, for example, victims of domestic violence, young people leaving care and gypsies and travellers.

Partners are responding actively to the challenge of climate change. They have made an excellent start to climate change planning. The Council is improving how it manages the county's waste. Targets to increase the amount of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting were all achieved in 2008/09 and almost 39 per cent of household waste is managed this way, a five per cent increase in just two years.

All the public agencies responded impressively to severe flooding across the county last year. They have learnt from the experience and have further improved emergency planning.

Access to services and facilities is a key issue for many people across this often sparsely populated county. Partners understand this and are working well together to provide people with more options for travel.

To promote well being and reduce health inequality, particularly in supporting those people who feel more vulnerable or who are at risk

People in Northumberland are generally not as healthy as they are in England as a whole. But in many ways things are improving. Death rates from all causes for men have gone down rapidly and are close to the national average. The decrease has been slower for women and the rate remains worse than average. There are also significant inequalities in Northumberland itself. On average men living in the county's most deprived areas die eight years earlier than men living in the most affluent areas. Women die six years earlier. Alcohol misuse is getting worse in Northumberland, as it is in many

other places. On average, smoking kills more people in Northumberland than it does nationally.

Partners are clear that they need to work together effectively if people's health is to improve and the inequality between the South East and the rest of the county is to reduce. They know what needs to be done and have introduced a number of successful programmes, for example, to screen for heart disease and cancer.

Schools are working well to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce the risk of children becoming obese. Fewer teenage girls got pregnant in 2005/07 compared with 1998/2000, the Government's baseline year. Teenage pregnancy, however, remains a bigger problem in the South East than elsewhere and recently partners haven't met their targets for reducing it.

The Care Trust is very good at helping people, especially older people, to live at home and so keep or recover their independence. It provides good support to people once they leave hospital and it actively supports carers.

To ensure that our communities have confidence in their capacity to bring about beneficial change and, by doing so, maintain and further develop a shared sense of belonging, pride and respect

Good partnership working has helped to reduce crime. As a result, Northumberland is safer than other similar areas in England and Wales. The numbers of house burglaries, robberies, vehicle crimes and sexual offences have all fallen. There are variations though across the county. For example, the rate of house burglary in the former district of Wansbeck was six times higher than in the former district of Alnwick in 2007/08, though so far this year there have been big reductions in both areas.

Although it's less of a problem than in many parts of the North East, action to tackle anti-social behaviour is beginning to pay off. In the current year both youth and adult anti-social behaviour has reduced.

Fire safety is improving. The number of deliberate fires reduced by 39 per cent between 2006 and 2008. Northumberland's roads are safer than they used to be, as a result of a range of safety initiatives.

Children and young people are generally safe at school and in the other settings Ofsted inspects. Schools take bullying seriously. Most schools are good or outstanding at helping pupils make a positive contribution to their community.

Partners are setting up new ways of involving local people in improving life in their communities. These include, for example, new area partnerships and community forums, but it is too early to judge how effective they are.

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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