



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

Audit Commission & ODPM Planning Inspections

Feedback to Staff

Gareth Jones & Steve Hampson



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‘Fair one-star service with uncertain prospects for improvement’

- Argued robustly for ‘Good’.
- Conflict between two reports.
- Will implement recommendations.

- Following is what the Audit Commission report said:



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Why Fair?

- Customer Satisfaction fell between 00/01 and 03/04.
- Slow speed of determining planning applications.
- Limited, not accessible guidance for applicants.
- Users not engaged to inform service delivery.
- No regular user forum.
- No user charter.
- Little Member training on planning specific issues.
- Public not allowed to address committee



Why uncertain prospects? (1)

- Serious capacity issues, council financial position.
- Staff striving to manage significant challenges.
- Little contingency for additional pressures.
- No clear succession planning.
- External funding used for essential planning posts.
- PDG ends in 2008 – what then?
- No clear understanding of value-for money.



Why uncertain prospects (2)

- Transformation Project – Benefits unclear.
- Business Process Reviews – Not clearly defined.
- Senior Strategic capacity reduced.
- Strategic skills/capacity for challenges?



Why almost 'Good' (1)

- Enables development that meets local, regional and national priorities:
 - New settlements,
 - Affordable housing,
 - Sustainability.
- Constructive approach to growth agenda:
 - Maximises benefits to local community/environment,
 - Minimises adverse impacts.



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Why almost 'Good' (2)

- High quality development encouraged.
- Specialist advice available.
- Key planning documents being prepared to guide future development.
- At forefront 'nationally' in LDF preparations.



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Why almost 'Good' (3)

- Quality and commitment of planning officers:
 - Recognised internally and externally.
- Councillors/Senior Officers appreciate pivotal role planning plays in achieving corporate objectives.



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Why almost 'Good' (4)

- Speed of determining applications improved in 05/06: - Baroness Andrews OBE said:

South Cambs is making excellent progress.

Please accept my congratulation on your success to date.

I see no reason to continue to scrutinise closely the activities of your authority.”



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Why almost 'Good' (5)

- Good collaborative working within Council and with external partners.
- Significant investment in new technology.



What next?

- Share findings with staff – today.
- Will implement recommendations – see Project Plan

We will:

- Address Capacity Issues
- Improve Customer Focus
- Direct Resources at priorities & need
- Use Systematic Value for Money Approach
- Address Committee/Member Capacity



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Questions?