Dear Colleague,

COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT (CAA)
ORGANISATIONAL ASSESSMENT

We are now entering the final stages of preparing CAA assessments for publication on 10 December 2009. Attached to this letter you will find our pre-publication draft version of your organisational assessment, most of which you will have seen before. I would be grateful if you would treat this as a confidential draft.

I would like to thank you for the help and support given to the Audit Commission CAA Lead and your appointed auditor. I hope that you have found this engagement open and constructive.

The assessment attached to this letter includes the overall organisational assessment score, managing performance score, use of resources score, and the summary and full text that will appear on the Oneplace website in December.

If you remain dissatisfied with the managing performance score and/or the use of resources score you may request a review by setting out the full case in writing to review-office@audit-commission.gov.uk before 5pm on Friday 23 October 2009. Before requesting a review, please read the review procedure which explains more about this.

Outside the review process we may agree with you changes to the wording of the assessment to improve clarity and address any remaining concerns you have.

I also have provided the pre-publication draft area assessment to your local strategic partnership chair and nominated contacts today. I have asked them to share that assessment with LSP partners.

Over the next few weeks we will share a summary picture of the emerging area and organisational assessments in each region with Government Offices and the Improvement and Development Agency so that they are aware of any significant issues for improvement planning.
I will send you a final copy of your organisational assessment by 5pm on Friday 4 December 2009. You will receive this under embargo until the 10 December 2009. I would ask you to respect this embargo.

Your organisational assessment will appear on the Oneplace website on 10 December 2009. This is a new joint inspectorate website for independent information about the performance and prospects for improvement of local public services throughout England. You can see a preview of the Oneplace website here.

Please contact your Audit Commission CAA Lead in the first instance if you have any questions.

Yours faithfully

Gareth Davies
Chair of the CAA Strategy Group

cc Your nominated contacts

Audit Commission CAA Lead
Audit Commission Appointed Auditor
Single Point of Contact, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary
East Northamptonshire Council

Organisational Assessment (Summary version)

Pre-publication version dated 19 October 2009

Provided under embargo

If you have any concerns about the assessment please discuss them with your CAA Lead first.
East Northamptonshire Council

Overall, East Northamptonshire Council performs adequately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of scores:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently</td>
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### Summary

East Northamptonshire Council is performing adequately. The Council is providing things that the community need most in a reasonable time and its services, staff and finances are being appropriately managed. Public perception of services is often quite different indicating that either some improvements are not visible or communications between the Council and its people are poor.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. This is because it is making appropriate progress in delivering the things that matter to the community. It is also working well, both on its own, and with partners such as other councils and the police, to make sure that improvement is likely to continue. But this has yet to be recognised by the residents with only 41.5 per cent being satisfied with the way the council runs things and only 28.4 per cent of residents thinking the council provides value for money.

Ambitious plans to improve and modernise Rushden town centre are moving forwards, despite the current economic downturn. People are being helped to deal with the recession. Advice is being provided for those struggling with debts. More people are claiming housing benefits and new claims are being processed faster than before.

Levels of crime overall are low, well below the average for Northamptonshire. Residents are less likely to be the victims of serious violence, burglary or major thefts than in other parts of the county. But many local people are unaware of this and actually have a higher fear of crime and disorder than in most other areas.
Some genuine progress is being made in making the district cleaner although satisfaction amongst residents was still low. Swift action is taken to remove illegally dumped rubbish and abandoned vehicles.

Only moderate progress is being made in protecting the local environment. Less household waste is being collected, with a substantial drop of more than five per cent during the last year. But the Council has more work to do on making sure that less greenhouse gasses are given off and the district’s carbon footprint is reduced.

The Council is having some success in helping the community to be healthier, with more young people using the Council’s leisure facilities while fewer adults than expected are participating in sport.

There is more work to do to improve equality of opportunity in the district, for all people, whatever background they come from. The Council has made little progress in this area recently, but is planning to meet the ‘achieving’ level in the new Equalities framework during 2009. Transport is a major issue for some groups of people.

Planning applications are now being dealt with more quickly, providing a much improved service. More has been done to make it easier for people to contact the Council. A new telephone system has been installed and a new, more useful website is being launched early next year.

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for Use of Resources. This is because it is getting a better understanding of what its services cost, with more work to do in this area. It is concentrating on things that the community say is important to them. Finances are being managed adequately. Spending is carefully planned and monitored. The Council is planning well for the future financially and has made proper allowance for the effect of the economic downturn, but can do more to predict possible problems. New more effective methods of measuring staff performance have been introduced. Effective negotiation of major contracts has saved £1 Million.
This assessment includes the summary and full text that it is intended to appear on the oneplace website in December. Your CAA Lead will have discussed this assessment, including any scores, with you in recent weeks.

Please read this assessment in conjunction with our letter to you dated 19 October 2009.

If you have any concerns about the assessment please discuss them with your CAA Lead first.

From 10 December 2009 you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website.

For more information, go to www.audit-commission.gov.uk/oneplace

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East Northamptonshire Council

Organisational Assessment

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**About East Northamptonshire Council**

East Northamptonshire is a district council in Northamptonshire in the East Midlands. The area has lots of countryside and is made up of small towns and villages. The largest town in the district is Rushden. The area has a growing population, with about 85,400 people currently and is predicted to grow faster than other parts of England.

There are more young people in East Northamptonshire compared to most other places and most people are of White British origin.

Residents of the district are in better circumstances than in many other parts of the country, although people from some parts of Rushden and Irthlingborough are doing less well. Average earnings are comparatively high, whilst unemployment is comparatively low. The number of benefit claimants is lower than average and the health of people is generally better than the national average, although there are some noticeable variations. For example, life expectancy is significantly higher for men but significantly lower for
women compared to the national average.

East Northamptonshire Council has 40 elected councillors and the Conservatives are in charge with 38 councillors.

The views of the local communities have influenced the council's vision 'To become an excellent Council in the eyes of the community'. The Council has identified three particular priorities, which it describes as 'corporate outcomes' to help make the vision a reality. Its plans take into account both national and regional requirements, as well as things identified by the community and other local organisations.

The Council's priorities are categorised into:

- Improvements for the community
- Improved processes and
- How we learn and grow.

Organisational assessment

Improvements for the community

The Council has collected a lot of information about the area and the communities it serves, and it is using this information well to find opportunities to stimulate the local economy. The Council is moving on with its ambitious plans to improve and modernise Rushden town centre, despite the current economic downturn. This project involves the Council, the County Council, Town Council and the local development company all working closely together, otherwise it would not be possible. The Council is providing both land and money to make the project a success.

People are being provided with useful help to deal with the recession. The number of people claiming housing benefits is increasing, but new claims are being processed faster than before, despite the increase in numbers. Advice is available for those struggling with debts. Council guidance leaflets have recently been rewritten in plain English to make them more understandable, after feedback from customers.

East Northamptonshire is a safe place. Levels of crime overall are low, well below the average for Northamptonshire. Residents are less likely to be the victims of serious violence, burglary or major thefts than in other parts of the county. Good progress is being made to reduce crime even further. But many local people are unaware of this and actually have a higher fear of crime and disorder than in most other areas. Help for vulnerable people has been provided by the Council’s community safety fund, to supply better locks and security lighting to deter criminals. Anti-social behaviour has reduced, partly due to the impact of Safer Communities Teams, which has increased the time officers spend on patrol.

Some genuine progress is being made in making the district cleaner. There is less litter, graffiti and fly-posting than before. Complaints about dog fouling
are going down. Swift action is taken to remove illegally dumped rubbish and abandoned vehicles. However residents are not yet fully convinced that things are improving, with local surveys showing that people have concerns about how clean the district is.

The Council is taking adequate steps to help make the community healthier. Fewer people are living in temporary accommodation and homelessness is dealt with effectively. Also, more new homes that people on low incomes can afford, have been built in the district. Participation in sporting activity is generally good in East Northamptonshire, with more young people using the Council’s leisure facilities. However, a Sport England survey showed that fewer adults took part in regular sport than the Council was expecting during the year.

Only limited progress is being made in protecting the local environment. Less household waste is being collected, with a substantial drop of more than five per cent during the last year. More waste is being recycled - currently 32 per cent - and more people are satisfied with the service provided. But the Council has more work to do on making sure that less greenhouse gasses are given off, the district’s carbon footprint is reduced and that people are using fuel more economically. Transport is a big issue for some sections of the community. Support is given to older persons through subsidised travel, but fewer young people than the Council intended are currently using the community transport scheme.

There is more work to do to improve equality of opportunity in the district, for all people, whatever background they come from. The Council has made little progress in this area recently and is updating its Equalities Scheme during 2009. People needing the most assistance are situated in a few small areas across the district. The Council is tackling this through what it calls Area Based Initiatives. A concentrated effort is made, by the Council and its partners, to improve the housing, environment and financial circumstances in these particular places. 78 per cent of local people in these areas believe that the completed work has made things better for them. A recent official survey shows that a high proportion of people believe that bad behaviour and a lack of respect and consideration for others are problems in the district. Also people do not feel that their views are listened to, when it comes to solving these problems.

**Improved processes**

The Council has dealt with difficulties in its Planning service well. Planned and proposed new building in the district has put a strain on the Council’s ability to deal with planning applications. The speed at which applications have been dealt with has been much slower than in other areas of the country. The Council has filled staff vacancies and changed some of the ways it deals with planning applications, to speed things up and meet government targets. Applications are now being dealt with more quickly, providing a much improved service.

More things have been done to make it easier for people to contact the Council, such as through the Rushden Centre, Oundle Tourist Information Office and Irthlingborough library. A new telephone system has been installed to make it easier to speak to the right people more quickly. Better information
is available to staff to deal with queries. A new, more useful website is being launched early next year.

The Council is working well with partners to deliver improvements for the district that people say they need. Enable is the local partnership of public bodies and the voluntary sector, who have together written a Sustainable Communities Strategy. This document explains what needs to be done and partners are currently agreeing how the various issues will be tackled.

Better information is being collected and used to help the Council improve. New computer software is being used to monitor the Council’s performance, which allows managers to see problems quickly and deal with them sooner. Information technology is being used more efficiently and the Council now works with the Borough Council of Wellingborough to provide a better service, and to make sure that data is protected and secure.

The approach to dealing with staff absence is better. Sickness levels have now fallen substantially and compare well with the best councils nationally.

The Council is getting better at predicting what problems might occur, using Risk Management, so it is more able to deal with them and reduce the impact if they do happen. But there is more work still to do in this area.

Finances are being managed adequately. Spending is carefully planned and monitored. The Council is planning well for the future financially and has made proper allowance for the effect of the economic downturn.

The Council has a better understanding of its costs, much of which it obtains from the periodic re-letting of its major contracts. It continues to keep a close watch on its financial overheads, but could do more to understand costs in this area. Cost and performance information is used directly in the financial and service planning processes. There is a good and consistent track record of using cost and performance information to advise Councillors when they are making decisions.

Changing the way it does things has helped the Council to regularly make savings, through better efficiency. Effective negotiation of major contracts for waste management, grounds maintenance and printing, has also saved £1 Million.

How we learn and grow

Learning is important to East Northamptonshire Council’s plans for the future. The Council is concentrating on having a better understanding of its communities and what they need. Customer Insight is a joint project of all councils in the county that is looking at how different people wish to find about and use public services. It is using the ‘Mosaic’ database to build up a picture of the different communities in the area. This approach is also being used to understand why some residents are much less satisfied with public services in the district than others. Using this information changes are made to benefit customers, such as increasing the variety of payment methods available. Each service the Council provides will be looked at in turn, to see how it needs to be changed to suit customers’ preferences.
The Council understands very well that it needs the right people working for it, to help the district improve and grow. It aims to have ‘Councillors and staff with the right knowledge, skills and behaviours’. Good progress is being made, but there is more work to do. There is now a better process to measure how well staff are working. The Council is good at listening to opinions from its staff and trying to deal with their concerns.

Staff are better informed about how they contribute to making the district better. They are more involved in deciding what they need to achieve, and also have to consider how this benefits the community. Training, particularly aimed at serving customers better, has been given a higher priority and the necessary funding. Staff have been actively involved in this work. The Council has previously had difficulties in recruiting and keeping the staff it needs. This new approach makes it more likely that the Council will have the people it needs to deliver the improvements that the community wants to see.