

Northamptonshire

Area Assessment

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oneplace

for an independent overview
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Contents

Northamptonshire at a glance

How is Northamptonshire doing?

About Northamptonshire

How well do priorities for Northamptonshire express community needs and aspirations?

Priorities for Northamptonshire

- To be successful through sustainable growth and regeneration
- To develop through having a growing economy and more skilled jobs
- To have safe and strong communities
- Healthy people who enjoy a good quality of life
- Children and young people


Northamptonshire at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Northamptonshire. 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

 Green flag: North Northamptonshire - recovery and rejuvenation

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

 Red flag: Alcohol harm

The local area

Northamptonshire is a county in the East Midlands. The county is largely rural, with market towns offering pleasant parks and varied town centres. The economy is based around the service sector particularly distribution, finance and manufacturing. The county has a relatively young population of around 678,000. Over 200,000 people live in Northampton, making it the largest town in England. Parts of the county have been identified as areas of major growth by the government. The majority of people in Northamptonshire are of white British origin, although the county has experienced influxes of migrant workers from Eastern Europe over recent years. The area has relatively low levels of deprivation.

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

How is Northamptonshire doing?

To be successful through sustainable

growth and regeneration

Northamptonshire's population is expected to grow rapidly. As well as ensuring new homes are built in the right place, councils and their partners need to ensure that they improve towns and preserve the character of villages. This is difficult, and Northamptonshire in the past has been less successful than many other places. Although over three quarters of local people like living in Northamptonshire, this is below the national average, and it varies across the county. South Northamptonshire and Daventry are above the national average, while three out of ten people are not happy about living in Wellingborough.

Councils and partners are starting to work together better. Over the last few years, this has led to big improvements particularly in Corby; the refurbished town centre; the train station and swimming pool have opened and the new civic centre - The Cube - is transforming the town. There has been a good response to the recession. Plans are being reviewed - there are new plans for Northampton, which is important for the county's economy. There is an awareness of the problems, and the difficulty in funding improvements. Partners are working well to resolve these, but difficulties around roads and public transport remain. There is a risk that traffic congestion will hinder plans for growth. The environment of Northamptonshire is well managed.

The number of new homes built broadly matches government targets - although there are pockets where numbers have not been met. Lack of affordable housing still affects parts of the county, but councils are aware of this and the challenges they face, although the shortage is likely to remain, especially in the south of the county.

To develop through having a growing economy and more skilled jobs

Northamptonshire's economy needs to grow at the same rate as new homes are built, otherwise the towns and villages will not be sustained. But the recession has put extra pressure on this area, as unemployment has risen faster than the national average. Those affected are in the lower skilled areas, especially around Northampton and the north of the county.

Councils, schools, colleges and local businesses and organisations are responding well. Threats to some jobs have been reduced by working together, for example around Silverstone, and new business support such as Chesham House in Kettering. Support has been provided across the county for those who are looking for jobs, such as free computer access on Fridays in the libraries so people can apply for jobs, attend job fairs and get career advice. Local businesses have been supported - double the original number expected. And new jobs are beginning to be advertised, although the total number is still less than the number of people seeking new jobs.

Support for developing skills is improving and good plans mean that improvement is likely to continue. More young people are getting good GCSE results, although overall levels have been lower than they should be. But this is changing and this year's results look like they have improved again, although

it still varies and children in care do less well. Young people leaving school have a wide range of choices available, including a wide range of Diploma courses. Tresham College is building a new campus in Corby which will mean more opportunities. Up to 350 new jobs will be created by March 2010 to help those who do not have a job or suitable training. Redevelopment of Northampton College campuses has also started with a multi-million pound investment. This will all help the county recover from the recession.

To have safe and strong communities

Despite falling crime levels, there is more chance of becoming a victim of crime in Northamptonshire than in similar areas. There are high and increasing levels of violent crime, although the number of less serious assaults has reduced. Robbery, theft and vehicle crimes are noticeably high in Northampton and are proving difficult to reduce significantly. Some people have concerns about anti-social behaviour which varies across the county.

People drinking too much is a major factor in many of the crimes and it contributes to high rates of domestic violence in Northamptonshire. About a quarter of the population of the county don't think people from different backgrounds get on well together. Trying to sort these problems out is a high priority for local public services. Many actions have been taken and there has been some success. Continuing concerted efforts are needed from the police, council's and other services for Northamptonshire to become a safer place.

Northamptonshire roads are getting safer with fewer deaths or serious casualties. The good work of the Casualty Reduction Partnership needs strengthening as the numbers are still higher than elsewhere. In contrast there are relatively few deaths from fires in the county or injuries from accidental fires.

Healthy people who enjoy a good quality of life

People in Northamptonshire have similar health problems to those in the rest of the country. However people in some parts of the county have poorer health and die earlier than others. Early deaths from heart disease and stroke are close to the England average but there are more early deaths from cancer in Corby, Wellingborough and Northampton than in other districts in Northamptonshire. Public bodies have agreed that they need to work together more closely to improve health in the county, particularly the areas of poor health, and have a plan to do this.

Smoking, repeat domestic violence and poor health caused by alcohol in particular all need to be cut. Campaigns are aimed at stopping people from drinking too much and people can get help to stop. But hospital stays due to alcohol have more than doubled since 2003 and the number of deaths caused by alcohol in males in Corby is the worst in England. A lot of people in Northamptonshire smoke compared to other areas in England including pregnant women. Activities targeted at smokers are helping to cut numbers but not quickly enough. Victims of domestic abuse can seek help from a

number of public bodies and voluntary organisations and some successful services are provided jointly. Work is underway to better support victims who may find it difficult to access services and those who are abused repeatedly.

Advice and information given to teenagers and their families is helping to slowly cut teenage conceptions. This is more successful in some areas than others.

More people living in Northampton have tuberculosis (TB) or HIV than other places in the county and parts of the region. Health services act quickly when someone is thought to have TB and this has successfully cut TB from earlier years. The Primary Care Trust (PCT) is spending a lot more on treatment and drugs for HIV which is increasing.

Care and support services for adults and young people who need them are adequate in Northamptonshire. More older and disabled people are being helped to live independently and more of their carers are given a choice in the type of support they need. Health and social services are working well together to stop older people getting stuck in hospital. Progress is slower in helping people with a learning disability move out of NHS run homes into a home of their choosing within a community setting.

Children and young people

Northamptonshire's provision for children and young people is getting better. It is currently satisfactory overall but there are some areas and some young people who do not get all the help they need. There is good support for children starting school and they have a positive start to their education. Children of all ages have good access to sport and high quality physical education at school. Obesity is not a problem for as many children as found nationally. Children experience less bullying than is reported elsewhere and there has been a big drop in the numbers killed or hurt in road accidents. Results, in school tests and exams, have been mixed. Assessments of the youngest children show they do well in their first year of school. By the end of their time in primary school most children achieve the expected level in English and mathematics. However results for older children are more varied. Fewer achieve five high grades in GCSEs, than young people in similar areas. Northamptonshire County Council data suggests results in 2009 exams show an improvement on previous years.

Most schools and all children's homes help children and young people to make a positive contribution to their school or local community. Two thirds of young people are involved in some form of structured recreational, cultural or sporting activity beyond school and fewer young people report misuse of drugs or alcohol than is found elsewhere. There are less young people committing a crime and entering the youth justice system.

Children who are looked after by the local council receive mixed help. Some are moved around too often and do not stay in one place long enough to become settled. Too few care leavers get jobs or gain more training or education when they leave the care of the council.

About Northamptonshire

A recent survey shows that in Northamptonshire 78 per cent of people are satisfied with their immediate local area as a place to live. This is lower than the average for similar areas and lower than the national average of 81 per cent.

Northamptonshire is situated to the south of the East Midlands region. Northamptonshire's environment is largely rural, with market towns offering pleasant parks and varied town centres. Most of the population is concentrated in a central north - south band. This includes Northampton, which is the largest town in England with over 200,000 people. Northamptonshire is part of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands growth area identified by the government.

The area has a population of around 678,000 people. It has a relatively young population although the older population is predicted to increase to higher than the national average. Northamptonshire is expected to experience the highest growth rate in the region. There is a relatively high white British population in the area. The Indian population is also fairly high, particularly in Northampton and Wellingborough. Parts of the county have experienced a notable increase in the numbers of migrant workers from Eastern Europe in recent years, particularly in Northampton.

Although Northamptonshire is a relatively well off area parts of it, like Corby and parts of Northampton, are much poorer. The economy is based around the service sector, particularly distribution and finance, though there is still substantial manufacturing. Unemployment is now higher than average across the county, but varies considerably depending on where you live. The number of job seekers allowance claimants is higher than average. Earnings are higher than national average, although again there are notable differences across the county, as there are with skill levels.

The health of people in Northamptonshire is generally similar to the national average, although there are inequalities by residence, gender and ethnic background. House prices are slightly higher than average. Northampton has experienced increasing rates of homelessness, and in some areas of the county, affordable housing supply has not been meeting demand.

How well do priorities for Northamptonshire express community needs and aspirations?

Many people in Northamptonshire are relatively well off and healthy. However there are parts of the county which are comparatively disadvantaged with poor health, high crime, low wages and housing which can be difficult to afford. Tackling this successfully at the same time as managing and making the most of the planned growth in houses and jobs are the main challenges facing the area.

These challenges are recognised in Northamptonshire's Sustainable Communities Strategy. It acknowledges the county's reputation for having under-performing public services and aims to improve performance and

services. The strategy accurately identifies the key challenges that need to be met for the county to prosper. These include;

providing housing in rural areas that is affordable;

tackling rural isolation;

developing better roads;

building a higher skilled economy with better paid jobs;

developing better educated and trained young people;

ensuring sustainable, competitive and prosperous towns;

reducing crime; and

reducing health inequalities.

It outlines the following four aims for Northamptonshire;

to be successful through sustainable growth and regeneration;

to develop through a growing economy with more skilled jobs;

to have safe and strong communities; and

healthy people who enjoy a good quality of life.

Recognising the need to strengthen services and achievements for children and young people, the Northamptonshire Partnership has also focused attention on improving exam results and making children healthier.

Critical to the success of the strategy is the delivery of housing and employment growth described in the Growth Area Plans for Northamptonshire. The scale of the projected growth requires careful planning. The timing of all of this - the houses, roads, jobs, schools, and other public services, - has to make sure the developments produce environmentally and socially sustainable communities which offer improved health, safety and prosperity.

Northamptonshire's Local Area Agreement brings together national and local priorities. It identifies specific improvements required to deliver the longer term Sustainable Communities Strategy. These are measured through targets and indicators that reflect local challenges and community needs.

The Northampton Partnership is improving the way it works. Partners did not work well together in the past but they now have a structure and leadership which is well placed to ensure local public services work effectively together to improve life in Northamptonshire. The prospect of less public money to deliver better services will require all members of the partnership to think of how things can be done differently and that money goes to areas with the greatest need.

To be successful through sustainable growth and regeneration

Green flag: North Northamptonshire - recovery and rejuvenation

The town of Corby has been transformed in recent years. Local people have noticed a big difference and pride is returning to the area. The number of residents satisfied with Corby has risen by 35 per cent over the last two years and is now better than similar areas. The number of people who think local public services act on their concerns and promote their interests is now higher than the average for the East Midlands and England.

The town suffered major economic, social and environmental decline in the mid 1980's. At the time the area was a single industry economy dependent on the steel works. It was self contained and inward looking. Transport links were poor and there was little engagement with the rest of the county or surrounding areas. The steel works closed in the mid 1980's decimating the fabric of the area which had one of the highest unemployment levels in the country. Years of decline followed and the quality of life for local people got worse. Although the old sites were cleared, limited progress was made on rebuilding the area, economically, physically or socially in the early days.

However in 2001 Catalyst Corby, the Urban Regeneration Company was set up and the decline has been turned around. The determination and unity of purpose over a period has transformed the area. Whilst there is more to do, the single minded efforts of the Development Corporation and local councils working alongside regional and national government, property developers, rail companies, and further education organisations have produced significant improvements. They have demonstrated what can be achieved in a small area that doesn't have the influence, heritage, population or infrastructure of larger towns or cities on which to build.

During the 1980's major retail stores in Corby closed, property was run down and new buildings tended to be poor quality. The area was tatty with a lot of graffiti, fly tipping and litter. Since then new homes, better facilities and better jobs have been created. A new train station has opened with hourly direct trains to London and higher than projected passenger numbers. Roads are better. Improvements to the A14 and A43 have opened up the area and helped attract new employers to Kettering and Corby. Other economic benefits are starting to show through. Although unemployment is high the number of jobs per person is higher than the regional and national average and increasing at a faster rate. Wages are low but are rising at double the national rate. Work related qualifications are again low but rising at a rapid rate and the number of people with no such qualifications has significantly reduced.

In Corby a new town centre is rising up. Old buildings replaced with award winning new ones, including the regions only Olympic size swimming pool, and The Cube - the new civic and arts centre. Phase one of the town centre redevelopment has brought new shops higher satisfaction levels and more visitors, despite the economic downturn.

Looking forward approved plans give confidence that the improvements will continue. Corby has secured £3.6 million to build a further 70 council homes, £2 million to further improve the town centre. Kickstart funding has been approved for three estates, which will help with the provision of more affordable homes and enable developers to start building earlier. And Corby Borough Council is continuing to consult on development plans which include more ambitious targets for housing, jobs and more shops.

There is still more to do to strengthen the economy, improve health and reduce crime. But strong partnership, focussed on one clear ambition has led to a successful transformation and demonstrated that small semi rural areas can be rejuvenated.

In awarding a green flag, we are not making any comment on issues concerning contamination from land reclamation sites between 1985 and 1998 that arose in the recent legal proceedings. This is because although the judgement is recent, the matters that it covers are well in the past.

To be successful through sustainable growth and regeneration

Northamptonshire's population is expected to grow rapidly. Almost 700,000 people already live in the county, and this could increase to over 900,000 as 125,000 new homes are to be built by 2023. The central location of the county means that access is generally good to other parts of the country. But road and rail transport across the county, and across Northampton, is poorer.

People like living in the villages of Northamptonshire, but do not enjoy the towns as much. Over three quarters of local people like Northamptonshire as a place to live, but this is lower than the national average. South Northamptonshire and Daventry have more people who enjoy living there than elsewhere in the county, and more than the national average. It is getting better, and some towns have shown big improvements.

In Corby, the town has identified why growth is important and set out clear aims and goals. Organisations working to help the town grow and improve know what to do and the role they play. Local people know what to expect and can see the town changing and improving. Recent changes include a new olympic size swimming pool, a new railway station with direct trains to London and an impressive civic centre that will include a new theatre and library. Daventry town centre is improving. Some towns are less focused on development, such as Wellingborough where the plans are new, development is limited and people least satisfied with the area as their home than elsewhere in the county.

Partners always recognised the importance of developing new homes alongside new jobs and improved services, such as roads and sewers. In some areas, the roads (for example) need to be improved before any new houses or jobs can be created. Usually, developers would help meet the cost of this work, but the recession means there is not as much money available. House prices have dropped and developers are looking to build houses where there is not so much need for improvement before the houses can be built. Where this is the case, such as in parts of Northampton and Wellingborough, the

existing problems of poor road access remains.

There has been a good response to the recession. Councils and partners have started working together and understanding each other. Further plans are emerging. In the north of the county, the plan that identifies where new homes and industry will be built is being reviewed. In the west a new draft plan has been issued. A new plan to develop Northampton has been released; Wellingborough is promoting its vision of the town centre and plans for Towcester are well advanced. There is now a vision for the county, supported by visions for the north and the west of the county, and for each of the boroughs and districts. Overall partners know where the strengths are and where more work is needed. Plans have been reviewed because of the changing economic position.

The rate at which new homes are being built is slower than expected, but partners including the councils, the development organisations and developers are using this time sensibly. The slow-down in development is helping organisations ensure the plans are in the right order. For example, the water company has identified where a main sewer will need improving before homes are built. The local council is taking this into account when planning a new road. These will all be completed before building new homes. The partners recognise the importance of developing in the right order and are starting to use the slow down in the economy to make sure this happens.

Town centres vary across the county. The main town, Northampton, has not met the needs and wants of local people or the county, but this is changing. The organisations responsible for managing the town centre have developed new plans and are working better together. Plans no longer compete against one another. The redevelopments in Northampton, Kettering and Daventry are starting to show what can be achieved, but much more is needed for the county town to lead the way in supporting sustainable regeneration.

In Wellingborough, development has been slow. Satisfaction with Wellingborough increased by only a small amount. Wellingborough has the lowest satisfaction as a place to live, of any borough in Northamptonshire. Here, plans are new and partners need to ensure that they meet the needs of, and are supported by local people.

The environment across the county is well-maintained. Councils recycle or compost just under half of all household waste. And the County Council is working with district councils, and the council in Milton Keynes, to examine choices for the future. The councils expect the discussions to take up to two years before they agree how and who will deal with waste. Costs will continue to rise and although the councils are working well, this needs to be well managed and carefully considered as risks remain. Local parks are attractive; six of the major county parks, such as Barnwell Country Park near Oundle, have awards, they are all different and are popular with local people. Councils and other groups have plans to improve local parks further, especially to increase the number of animal and plant species that live there.

It can be a problem travelling around the county, although there are improvements. Until recently, Corby did not have a train station, but opening the new station has improved links to the south of England. The number of people using this station is twice as high as expected. Road transport across the county can be difficult. Plans to improve parts of the A14 around Kettering

and roads around Corby should reduce congestion. But more needs to be done to improve buses and make it easier for people to use different buses, especially in the smaller towns. Increases in traffic, and a lack of suitable buses could impact on towns such as Towcester. Broadly speaking, local people are not satisfied with the local buses, or information about buses. Attempts to reduce congestion on roads by getting people to travel by bus have had little success. Until satisfaction with buses improves, there remains a risk that road congestion will hinder plans for growth.

The number of new homes built has broadly matched government targets, although there are pockets where numbers have not been met. Lack of affordable housing is a problem in parts of the county, especially rural areas, but less so in the north. Nevertheless, the number of affordable homes built in recent years has increased, although this will drop because of the recession. The response to the recession has been mixed. In some villages, good initiatives have been delivered because partners have worked together well, such as the low energy affordable homes in Bozeat.

Good plans are helping meet further needs - such as the new rural housing policy in South Northamptonshire - although the potential to develop in villages is limited. Corby has secured extra money to ensure that new homes continue to be built even during the recession, including new affordable homes. Across the county, councils and their partners are working well to deliver as many affordable homes as possible, but it is important that these are the right mix of rented and shared ownership homes so that they meet the needs of local people. Partners understand the pressures and challenges being faced, but there is likely to be a shortage of affordable homes in parts of the county, especially the southern rural areas.

To develop through having a growing economy and more skilled jobs

Northamptonshire's priority of a growing economy with more skilled jobs supports the growth and regeneration of the county. It was recognised that more houses alone will not make Northamptonshire sustainable, as without jobs they would have to work elsewhere. This would mean travelling long distances, causing congestion and pollution. It would also mean that they would probably spend their money out of the county, and new housing areas may lack a community focus since people would work a long way from home. New jobs have to be created at the same rate as new homes are built.

Unemployment was lower than national levels but salaries were lower as well. This was because many jobs were unskilled and paid low wages. Businesses and industry often looked on Northamptonshire as a county where the workforce had little ability, and where people did not want to do well. Young people did not do well at school. Towns did not attract shoppers and businesses did not invest in local towns. Plans were set up to address these problems and these views within the county and across the country.

The recession has not helped Northamptonshire. Since those organisations responsible for encouraging new jobs to the county agreed on their priorities, the recession has changed what needs to be done - at least in the short term.

Protection of existing jobs, as well as growing the economy, became important.

Areas of the county have been affected differently because of the recession. Overall, unemployment rates have gone up from 1.9 per cent in July 2008, when they were lower than the national level, to 4.4 per cent in July 2009, above average. Some well-paid jobs have been lost, but most jobs that have been lost are lower paid ones. In South Northamptonshire unemployment was 2.4 per cent in July 2009, and 6.8 per cent in Corby - almost three times higher. The proportion of young people not in education, employment or training is increasing, but lower than the national average. July 2009 figures stood at 8.4 per cent, varying from a low in South Northamptonshire of 2.9 per cent to a high of 11.4 per cent in Northampton.

Councils and their partners are responding well to the challenges of the economic recession. Recognising that all the partners needed quick information about where the problems and challenges may be arising, Northamptonshire Enterprise Ltd (NEL) now produces a monthly barometer of the local economy. This includes up to date information, reported at a local level. Councils and other organisations can identify where they need to take action, and the scale of the problems faced. For example a joint bid, led by NEL, got funding to support new jobs through the Future Jobs fund; 350 new jobs will be created by March 2010. These jobs will mainly support young people who have been unable to find work and are not in training or education and new jobs in areas of higher unemployment, such as in the north of the county. A further 500 skilled jobs have come to Corby and the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT), the rail/ road terminal near Daventry, has continued to expand. The centre makes good use of the location near the M1 and has a direct link to the west coast main railway line. Events were held across the county to support local businesses and help local people get back into work.

In South Northamptonshire, where the problems were different, direct support is provided for both the unemployed and local businesses. There is free computer and internet access in libraries on Fridays so people can apply for jobs that were advertised in the local paper. Support was provided to keep high skilled jobs, linked to Formula 1 motor-racing, and the motor team Brawn located in the county.

New businesses are being encouraged and supported through initiatives, such as Chesham House in Kettering and Northampton's Portfolio Centre run by the University of Northampton and Daventry's planned 'ICoN' office and conference centre. There remain good and clear plans, under the banner 'Let Yourself Grow', including a range of new businesses and business support such as developing the business and leisure around Silverstone. An event with Brawn, in June 2009, to help people set up new businesses, attracted 80 people - 54 returned for business support training and six have now started a new business. Although the risks remain high, and the rate of new jobs is not currently as high as initially planned, there are good arrangements to understand and manage these risks.

Good progress is being made on improving the skills of local people, including young people and those who are vulnerable. For example, the University of Northampton is leading a group of partners on a project called Job Shop. This will help unemployed people improve their skills and education and improve

their chances of getting a new job. The County Council and local schools have worked with the young people to improve the chance of getting a good job. The number of young people getting good GCSE results is improving, although overall levels are still lower than they should be. Good work means this year's results could be better than previously. However achievement varies; children and young people in care do less well and the gap between those receiving free school meals and the rest of their class is too wide. There are good plans, including school partnerships, extended schools and new schools to make sure more improvements are made.

Plans to help people continue to gain more skills throughout their life are good although some have stalled because of the recession. For example, plans for improvements to Tresham College have been changed in Corby and Wellingborough, although the college has received funding of £27 million to develop a new campus in Corby. Work is expected to start soon on the new site which will offer training in construction, motor vehicle, hair and beauty, sport, health, care and business. The building also supports the regeneration of Corby, being a link between the new railway station and the town centre. Development of skills for later in life has been patchy - not always good in schools but better in colleges. Now there is a good strategy for young people aged 14-19 with a good range of Diplomas available so they can carry on learning if they want to. Since 2005, the number of young people getting Level 2 and Level 3 NVQs has improved. Initiatives such as this will help ensure that people gain further qualifications and experience, and will help the area improve after the end of the recession.

To have safe and strong communities

Crime in Northamptonshire is higher than similar counties. Last year there were 88 recorded crimes per 1000 residents in the county which is eight more than similar areas. The figure is coming down but not fast enough to close the gap on other areas. Serious violence is high and has seen a steep increase recently. The number of less serious assaults is better than average and coming down. However crime fuelled by alcohol, particularly violent and sexual crime, is high in Northampton and violent crime due to alcohol is also high in Corby. The number of young people committing a crime and entering the youth justice system is dropping. However re-offending by young people in Northamptonshire is slightly worse than in similar areas and a high number are sentenced to custody. Re-offending by adults is close to the predicted rate.

The chance of being a victim of crime varies depending on where you live. Whilst South Northamptonshire is relatively safe, you are most likely to suffer crime in Northampton and Corby.

A real concern is the high level of vehicle crime, robberies and burglaries in the west of the county - Northampton in particular. The police and their partners recognise the problem and are working hard to sort this out. And with some success as vehicle crime and robbery has reduced.

Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour is clearly important to local people with nearly one in five agreeing it's a problem. This is actually better than the national average but it's worse than similar counties. Again it does depend on where you live in the county. The residents of Wellingborough are the most concerned, over one in four, whilst people living in South Northamptonshire

have the lowest levels of worry about crime - fewer than one in ten. However less than half of the people in Northamptonshire think that the police and local authorities deal successfully with anti-social behaviour and crime.

Reported offences of domestic violence are higher than similar areas. People who suffer from domestic abuse are more likely to report repeated attacks. Domestic abuse, much of it alcohol fuelled, accounts for around one in four violent crimes in the county. This compares with around one in six in other places. Tackling this well needs the police, probation, councils, the health service and voluntary organisations to join forces. This is happening in Northamptonshire through the Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Forum (NorDAF) which is reviewing its approach and plans.

The police and local services recognise they need to do more to further reduce crime and anti-social behaviour across the county, especially in Northampton. They are now working better together than they have in the past. For example, work with local schools to target likely culprits and victims during the after-school period made a difference. The police and partners have set up Safer Community teams to tackle problems in local areas and neighbourhoods. Targeted police operations have been successful in reducing specific types of crime. Setting up the police desk in Northampton Borough Council One Stop Shop has improved crime and criminal reporting.

Similar things have been done in Kettering and Daventry and the police and probation are doing more to stop criminals committing more crime. However despite the successes the levels of violence, robbery, theft and car crime are still high. To reduce crime quicker and make Northampton and the county safer the police and local services understand they need to strengthen their respective and joint efforts.

Around 75 per cent of people think they get on well with people from different backgrounds. This is below the average for the country and has declined over the last two years. There has been a big improvement in Corby but it is still only approaching seven out of ten people who think they get on well with others from different backgrounds. The picture in Northampton is similar. This contrasts with South Northamptonshire where approaching nine out of ten believe they get on well together. Nearly one in three people think that treating each other with respect is a problem in the county, particularly in Wellingborough where over 38 per cent believe it's a problem. Crime related to race or religion has recently increased but does remain quite low. Local services have recognised they need to improve this and are working on a set of plans to strengthen community cohesion including a stronger response to hate incidents.

A high number of people are killed or seriously injured on Northamptonshire's roads. Compared with other areas many deaths in vehicles are caused by alcohol, particularly in Daventry and Corby. However the overall number of serious casualties is coming down. 386 people died or were seriously injured on the county's roads in the 12 months to April 2009, still high but over 100 fewer than the previous year. For roads to be safer different services need to work well together. Northamptonshire's Casualty Reduction Partnership undertakes a number of schemes including providing education for all road users including schoolchildren on the risks and dangers associated with roads. These schemes are working well and 'Beacon' status was awarded to the

partnership for its efforts to make the county's rural roads safer.

Not many people die in fires in Northamptonshire and fewer people are injured in accidental fires. Smoke alarms are fitted in higher risk homes, but at a slower rate than in other counties. Previously only a small proportion of high risk properties were visited and it was taking a long time for people to receive a safety check. However changes were made and information about people in particular danger is now shared by the police and fire service and a safety check for those people is usually carried out within 24 hours.

Healthy people who enjoy a good quality of life

Red flag: Alcohol harm

Most people in Northamptonshire drink alcohol without damaging themselves or others. But for many, alcohol causes real problems, more so than elsewhere in the country. Alcohol consumption causes a high number of health problems and accidents in Northamptonshire. It is also a significant reason for the high levels of violent crime. Public bodies are not co-ordinating their activities well enough to deal with this.

Although binge drinking is not a big problem in the county there is a lot in Corby and it happens in other localities across the county. Alcohol related crime is high in Northampton and Corby, and it contributes to high levels of violent and sexual crime, including domestic violence. Young people drinking alcohol is also likely to play a part in some teenage pregnancies and anti-social behaviour. The estimated number of people dying from vehicle accidents where alcohol was a cause is much higher than the rest of the country. Daventry and Corby are the worst areas.

The number of people admitted to hospital because of alcohol is actually lower than the rest of the country but it's getting worse. It more than doubled between 2002 and 2008, mainly in Corby and Northampton. The rate is now increasing at a rate of 20 per cent a year. People in Corby suffer the worst. Alcohol related benefit claims are very high and ultimately more men per head in Corby die from conditions which are caused by alcohol than virtually anywhere else in England.

Some things are being done to try to improve the situation. The health service has introduced special nurses at hospitals and training for local doctors and local services. Some work has been done to highlight the harm caused by alcohol and the police have a good understanding of the areas most affected by alcohol related crime and are trying to deal with it. For example introducing polycarbonate glasses across the county has helped reduce injuries.

Local services agreed the Northamptonshire Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy in 2006. This reflected the national strategy and identified four objectives;

better education and communication;

better identification and treatment of alcohol problems;

better co-ordination and enforcement to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour; and

working with the alcohol industry to reduce harm.

However the strategy has not been effective. Local services have not had a concerted effective focus on alcohol harm. Although the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) Plan for 2008/09 recognises the close link between drug and alcohol misuse it makes no reference to the Strategy. Despite action plans for children and young people making a link between drugs and alcohol action plans for adults do not say what should be done.

Although local services have projects on alcohol awareness and the consequences of drinking too much, they have not sorted out what else they need to do jointly to reduce all the different problems that drinking alcohol is causing for many local people. Until they do the situation is not likely to improve.

What's being done in response?

The Northamptonshire Public Services Board plan to hold a conference to discuss and agree what needs to be done.

The Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) treatment plans will be reviewed and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment will include a comprehensive section on alcohol to further help identify need and targeting of resources to specific segments of the local population in the future.

Discussions are taking place about the improvements which are needed. We'll update this section with more information when this is agreed.

Healthy people who enjoy a good quality of life

People in Northamptonshire have similar health problems to those in the rest of the country. However people in some parts of the county have poorer health and die earlier than others. Men in Corby live about five and a half years less than men in South Northamptonshire and women in the town live nearly three years less. There are also pockets across the rest of the county where people tend to live shorter lives. Early deaths from heart disease and stroke are close to the England average, although rates from cancer are getting slightly worse. People die earlier from cancer in Corby, Wellingborough and Northampton than in other parts of Northamptonshire.

Improving this situation is a challenge for the public services in the county. As people in Corby have a lot of health problems more money is provided to cut smoking and drinking and increase exercise and healthy eating. Kettering and Northampton also have projects aimed at improving the health of people in the poorest areas. The NHS in Northamptonshire runs a lot of activities across the county to help people to live healthier lives. The 'Run '09' is a major event for the county to promote walking and running by children and adults. Some are directed at areas with the poorest health. However, the NHS and other local services understand that they need to do much more together and target their actions at areas with the worst health. To make this happen a

'Staying Healthy Plan' was recently agreed by public bodies in the county.

Hospital stays due to alcohol have more than doubled in the county from 4475 in 2002/03 to 9624 in 2007/08, mainly in Corby. The number of male deaths caused by alcohol in Corby is the worst in England. Although binge drinking is not a big problem in the county there is a lot in Corby and some small areas elsewhere in the county. Some help is provided to stop people drinking - in GP surgeries, the two general hospitals and by a voluntary organisation - but more needs to be done.

More people in Northamptonshire smoke than the England or East Midland average. A lot of women smoke when they are pregnant which may cause harm to their baby. Support for people to stop smoking is directed at groups and areas where more people smoke such as central Northampton and Corby and this has helped many to quit, particularly in Corby. Extra money was also given to local services to help those people who do not usually ask for help to stop smoking. Despite this and other schemes too many people still smoke.

More people living in Northampton have tuberculosis (TB) or HIV than other places in the county and parts of the East Midlands. However health services do act quickly when someone is thought to have TB and this has successfully cut the number of people suffering from the disease. HIV is however on the increase. Some sections of the population are more at risk of getting HIV and local health services are spending more money on treating people and are working with voluntary organisations to better support people.

Local services work together to secure the health of children and young people and to promote healthy lifestyles, although access varies across services and areas. The number of children who are obese is lower than average although the number of eleven year olds who are obese is increasing. All children's homes, most nursery and primary schools and three quarters of secondary schools, are good at helping children learn about healthy living and encourage them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Schools provide good access to sport and high quality physical education. More work needs to be done to ensure that all young people have the best opportunities for a healthy lifestyle, especially in provision for children whose circumstances make them more vulnerable such as those attending pupil referral units.

Fewer teenage girls are becoming pregnant in the county than in recent years. Again there is a lot of variation across the county. In many areas the improvement is small and slow and Daventry has actually seen the number of teenage conceptions grow by 17 per cent. Advice and information is given to teenagers and their families to prevent pregnancy and young mums in Corby are helped to look after themselves and their babies by a special midwife.

The County Council has plans to significantly increase the numbers of older and disabled people being given their own budget to live more independent lives. This will enable them to decide themselves what support and help they want to buy. As well as this more carers are being given a choice in the type of help they want. Better working between health and social services has meant older people get out of hospital quicker. This is either back home or somewhere like a care home where they are helped to get better. They have also managed to cut the numbers going into hospital in the first place. They have made it safer and better for older and disabled people to stay at home by improving the way they provide special equipment and make alterations to

people's homes.

Slower progress has been made to improve the independence of some people with a learning disability. Some still live in health service accommodation. But health and social services have given personal budgets to each of the 89 people to help them get their own care and support. Accommodation will be arranged so that each person has their own tenancy. November 2009 is the start date for the changes and it is expected that everyone will know where they will be living and with whom by March 2010. The delays in helping people to move are due to making sure the money was available and partly to making sure the complex needs of some of the people can be properly met.

Domestic abuse in Northamptonshire is rising and many victims are attacked more than once. Violence in the home causes physical and mental harm to children and families. Health services, the police and other organisations such as probation services are working together to reduce domestic abuse and support its victims. They work together through the Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Forum (NorDAF) and have a good understanding of what to do to better support victims and children affected. The police have set up a Domestic Abuse Unit to improve the way abusers are brought to justice. This may have encouraged more victims to report abuse.

The Sunflower Centre service provides good support to victims through specialist domestic abuse advisers. However the future of the service is not fully secure and there is also less support to victims from other voluntary organisations - they can help fewer people. The service a victim receives depends on where they live in the county. Local services have recognised this and are working to improve the support to victims, particularly those who may find it difficult to access services. They have now agreed a clear target to reduce the number of people who are repeatedly abused.

Children and young people

Local services work together to secure the health of children and young people and to promote healthy lifestyles, although success varies across services and areas. The number of children who are obese is lower than average although the number of eleven year olds who are obese is increasing. All children's homes, most nursery and primary schools and three quarters of secondary schools, are good at helping children learn about healthy living and encourage them to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Schools provide good access to sport and high quality physical education. More work needs to be done to ensure that children and young people whose circumstances make them more vulnerable have the best opportunities for learning about healthy lifestyles, especially in provision for those attending pupil referral units.

Arrangements to help children stay safe are usually effective, although there are areas that need to get better. Local agencies for fostering and adoption are judged to be adequate but most schools and all children's homes are good at promoting children's safety. Children experience less bullying in Northamptonshire, compared with other places. There has been a big drop in the number of children killed, or hurt badly, on the county's roads. The number of children going to hospital following an injury - whether deliberate or an accident, is about the same as other areas. An Ofsted inspection of front line social care services identified some effective practice in child

protection procedures and the arrangements for safeguarding children in need and their families. However some improvements are needed, such as the way information is recorded.

Partners are working well together to enable children to enjoy themselves and achieve better results in school. But in some places, outcomes are poor and although they are improving, they are not yet good enough. Council services are working closely with schools and are focussed on improving attainment for all. This is challenging schools to raise standards - and the council's data following the 2009 exams suggest that more children and young people are achieving the expected level in national tests. The youngest children do well in developing socially and emotionally and many gain good communication skills in their first year of school. By the end of primary school, overall attainment is just below the national average. In secondary schools, the proportion of young people achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is improving but still below similar authorities and the national picture. However, fewer than half of all secondary schools are judged as good and behaviour is often poorer than similar areas. More work needs to be done to ensure all young people have successful learning opportunities. Some parts of the community, including children from low income families and some minority ethnic groups, achieve less well than others of the same age.

More young people make a positive contribution to society than those who do not. Most schools and children's care homes are good at helping young people make a positive contribution, but this is not the case in all pupil referral units. About two thirds of young people are involved in some sporting, cultural or recreational activity after school. Fewer young people misuse drugs or alcohol than in many other places and the number of young people committing a crime and entering the youth justice system is dropping. A higher proportion of young people who are caught offending are sentenced to custody than in areas similar to Northamptonshire.

When they leave school at sixteen, most young people are involved in some form of education or training, or they have a job. The development of the skills needed for future economic prosperity and quality of life is planned for through the partners' strategy for young people aged 14 to 16. Although young people have a good choice in the courses they can follow only just over a half of secondary schools are judged by Ofsted to be good at promoting workplace skills and economic well-being. Most school sixth forms and colleges do well in this area. The proportion of young people who achieve a level 2 or level 3 qualification is improving in line with the national average, but improvement is not consistent across the county. Only about a half of young people from low income families gain a level 2 qualification compared to almost three quarters of their peers.

Children who are looked after by the local council receive a mixed service. Some children have too many changes of home and they perform poorer in school exams at the end of primary school. Fewer young people who leave care get a job or are involved in training or go on to further education than similar areas and nationally, reducing their life chances. But most young people leaving care are found suitable homes. Arrangements to keep children with learning difficulties or disabilities safe are good. The gap, between how many of the children with special educational needs achieve in school tests and the rest of the children and young people in the county, is smaller than many similar areas.

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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