

Service Inspection Report

October 2005



# **Environment - Waste Management**

**Newark and Sherwood District Council**

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### Service inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission's Inspectorate under powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003). Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's web site at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

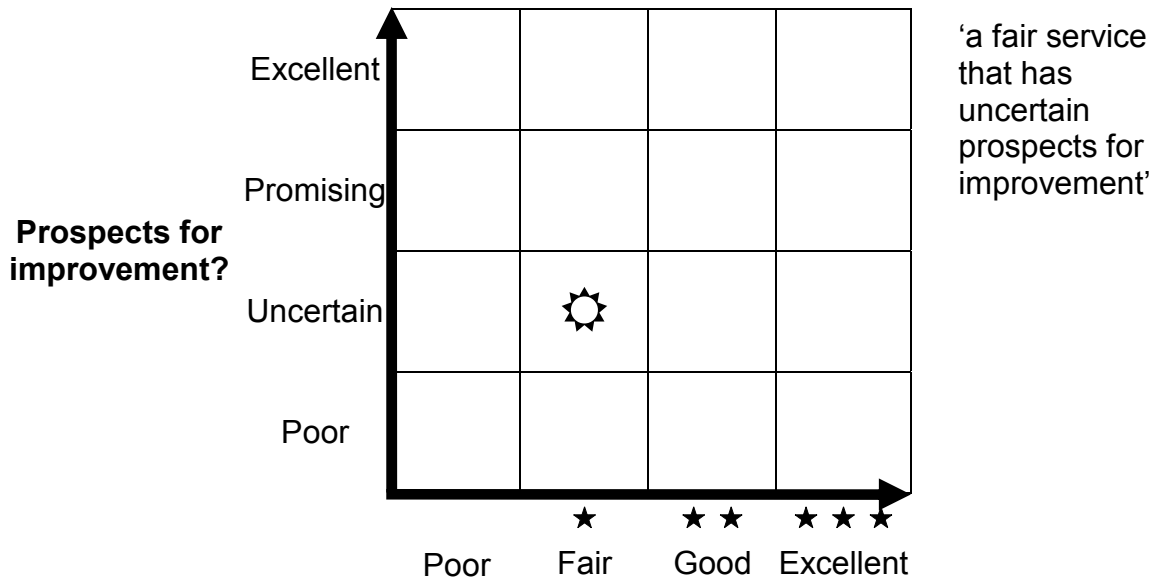
## Summary

- 1 We inspected the Council's environment services in August 2005. This covered refuse collection, recycling, street cleaning, bulky waste collections and dealing with associated issues, such as fly tipping.
- 2 The track record on recycling has been disappointing and in 2003/04 the Council recycled just 8 per cent of household waste, which was the third lowest district council in England. In 2004/05 the Council missed its own target (of 18 per cent) and recycled just 11 per cent of the household waste it collected. There are areas of the district that do not meet acceptable standards for cleanliness although the area is predominantly clean and the refuse collection service is reliable.
- 3 There has been a recent focus on improving recycling. The Council introduced a new recycling service ('the silver bin') and recycling rates have improved. Twenty two per cent of household waste was sent for recycling between April and July 2005, meeting the Council's recycling target.
- 4 However, the Council has no clear vision for the future of the service. There are no clear priorities or targets for improvement and no consistent view within the Council on the expectations of waste management or other environmental initiatives.
- 5 Yet the Council has started to recognise this. As part of the waste management strategy for the district the Council has looked at the options available for recycling and has invested an extra £50,000 in helping keep the rural parts of the district clean.
- 6 We have judged that Newark and Sherwood District Council provide a fair, one-star, environment - waste management service which has uncertain prospects for improvement.

## Scoring the service

- 7 We have assessed Newark and Sherwood District Council as providing a ‘fair’, one-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Table 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>:**



### A good service?

#### Audit Commission

- 8 The service is a fair, one-star service because of the following.
- The Council has set protecting and improving the environment as one of its priorities, yet its actions are inconsistent with good practice in some areas not being replicated elsewhere. Overall it has a good understanding of issues but can not demonstrate that these are used to effectively drive through improvements.
  - The Council has a reliable refuse collection service but has not been successful in minimising the amounts of waste produced and has a disappointing track record in encouraging recycling, although it has recently introduced a new scheme which has improved the recycling of household waste.

<sup>1</sup> The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- The district is predominantly clean but this is inconsistent across the area and satisfaction with the cleanliness is low. Despite well organised enforcement activities, fly tipping has increased and the Council did not meet its own target for the time to clear fly tipped waste.
  - There are some good examples of community involvement and awareness of diversity issues, but the approach is inconsistent and some changes have been made without the full implications on all sections of the community being considered.
- 9 The Service has uncertain prospects for improvement because of the following.
- The Council has not decided what its future aims for recycling, waste collection and cleansing will be, or their relative priority. There is no clear and consistent vision for recycling and no clear view on what the priorities for improvement will be.
  - Learning from evaluation is limited and performance management is not fully embedded.
  - However, the recent twin bin recycling implementation was successful, generally well received by customers and accompanied by good education and promotion.
  - Service managers showed effective leadership in managing the recycling changes and staff showed considerable commitment to improvement.

## Recommendations

- 10 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate costs<sup>1</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

*R1 Determine clear and explicit priorities for the Council and the Service:*

- *so that services, officers and partners are clear on what the Council intends to improve.*

*The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:*

- *clarity in what the Council is intending to do and where the Council is content with the current level of service; and*
- *Improved focus for members, senior officers and service managers in what they are expected to do and how their job contributed to the overall aims and priorities of the Council.*

*The implementation of this recommendation will have **high** impact with **low** costs. This should be implemented by before the Council concludes the negotiations with the county council over the waste management strategy.*

*R2 Use the overall priorities to inform and steer negotiations with the county council on the PFI:*

- *so that negotiations are informed by the Council's aims and aspirations as well as operational requirements.*

*The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:*

- *to ensure that the Council can achieve good value for money in delivering recycling and waste management arrangements that are relevant for the district and contribute to the countywide strategy that the Council is committed to.*

*The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by the end of March 2006.*

*R3 Establish formal evaluation mechanisms so that good and poor practices are identified and cascaded throughout the council and its partners:*

- *reviewing and sharing learning and experiences across the Council; and*
- *encouraging innovation within service managers.*

<sup>1</sup> Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

*The expected **benefits** of this recommendation are:*

- *greater corporate and strategic awareness within the Council, especially amongst service managers; and*
- *improve the capacity within service areas by sharing skills, transferring knowledge and enable problems and challenges to be resolved using the skills of the Council rather than restricted to the service.*

*The implementation of this recommendation will have **medium** impact with **medium** costs. This should be implemented within a year and reviewed after 12 months.*

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 11 Newark and Sherwood is situated in the east midlands of England. Covering an area of 65,000 hectares, it is the largest of the seven Nottinghamshire district councils. One hundred and eight thousand, six hundred people live in the district (2001 census), an increase of 3.2 per cent over 1991.
- 12 The district has contrasting areas of agriculture, market towns, commuter and rural 'coalfield' villages. It includes the former borough of Newark, the small cathedral town of Southwell and approximately 90 villages and hamlets, of which nearly half are conservation areas. About one third of the population live within the Newark conurbation.
- 13 The economy of the district has changed, moving away from manufacturing towards services. Unemployment is 1.5 per cent (May 2005) which is below both the regional and national figures (both 1.9 per cent), although the average wage, at £340.63, is lower than the regional average.
- 14 On the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD), the district ranks as 143rd (out of 354), where one is the most deprived.

### The Council

- 15 There are 46 councillors in the Council. The Conservative party is the largest single party, with 23 seats, but no party has overall control. Labour have 12 councillors whilst there are seven Independents and four Liberal Democrats.
- 16 The Council is controlled by the Leader and Cabinet model of governance. The Cabinet is made up of the Leader of the Council and six other councillors, and comprises of five Conservative, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent councillor. There are three Overview and Scrutiny Committees that review the decisions of Cabinet and assist in policy development.
- 17 The Council employs 500 full and part-time staff and is structured into three departments. Its proposed revenue budget for 2005/06 is £12,891,090.
- 18 In April 2005 the Council adopted new priorities and aims. The Council's aim is:  
*'to make Newark and Sherwood an excellent performing council.'*

And the Council's priorities are:

- to encourage Economic Prosperity for all;
- to provide Leisure and Health opportunities for all;
- to protect and improve the Environment;

- to ensure affordable Homes built to modern standards are available for all; and
- to maintain Safer Communities.

### **The Council's waste and cleansing services**

- 19** The Council provides the majority of its waste management services directly. A total of 74.5 full time equivalent posts are employed across the waste management and transport services. The total budget for refuse and street cleansing, for 2005/06, is £2.75 million.
- 20** In January 2005 the Council switched its refuse service to an alternate week collection. Ninety seven per cent of homes are now offered two wheeled bins, one for waste and the other (a 'silver' bin) for recycling. Each bin is emptied every other week by the Council's own workforce. Three per cent of homes are still offered a weekly refuse collection based on bags.
- 21** The district council and local parish and town councils help keep the district clean. In some parish areas, the parish council cleans streets directly, and in other areas they operate on an agency basis for the district council. Across the rest of the district, the district council directly employs the street cleaners. Newark and Sherwood District Council, as the principal litter authority, has responsibility for litter across the whole district.
- 22** Both services operate from a new purpose built depot in Newark which also houses vehicle maintenance.
- 23** In December 2001 we inspected the Council's waste management services and judged them to be a good, two-star service which was probably going to improve. This inspection, carried out in August 2005 also looks at the Council's overall approach to the environment and the judgements we have made are against criteria that have been revised in between the last inspection and August 2005.

### **National context - waste management**

- 24** Waste Disposal Authorities (WDAs) and Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) carry out waste management functions. Newark and Sherwood district council is the WCA and Nottinghamshire County Council is the WDA.
- 25** The Government has set objectives for local authorities to reduce the amount of waste that is collected and to encourage more recycling. Newark and Sherwood's target for recycling and composting was eight per cent by 2003/04 (originally 10 per cent, but lowered as part of a pooling agreement with Nottinghamshire County Council) and is 18 per cent by 2005/06. The Council has agreed to stretch this target to 21 per cent as part an agreement with Nottinghamshire County Council.

### **National context - keeping the district clean**

- 26** Councils have a duty to keep their land clear of litter. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) gives a local authority power to deal with litter based problems affecting its area, including issuing fixed penalty tickets to people who commit an offence by dropping litter. A Code of Practice, issued under the act, recommends a 'clean as necessary' approach and specific levels of cleanliness for various environments. Under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act an authority has the power to issue a notice to a private landowner to clean up their land and to undertake the cleansing itself if the landowner fails to act. The Clean Neighbourhoods Act (2003) strengthens a council's legislative powers for keeping the area clean.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 27 The stated aim of the service was:
- 'to provide domestic and trade waste collection, recycling and disposal services and to maintain the cleanliness of the district through street sweeping services and enforcement'.*
- 28 This was changed slightly in the 2005/06 service plan to read:
- 'to provide domestic and trade waste collection, recycling and disposal services'.*
- 'to maintain the cleanliness of the district through street sweeping services, fly-tipping removal, abandoned vehicle management and enforcement.'*
- 29 During the last few years the Council has adopted a series of different targets for the amount of waste it intended to recycle. These have varied significantly from being a top performing council, with a recycling rate of 50 per cent by 2005/06 to just meeting the minimum statutory requirement. In 2004/05 it adopted a recycling target of 27 per cent by 2005/06. The current recycling target, of 22 per cent by 2005/06, was set after the Council selected its current recycling service, and is consistent with the type of scheme chosen.
- 30 The service has set satisfaction with cleanliness as its main measure for the cleanliness of the district and in 2004/05 aimed *'to improve the satisfaction rating of street cleansing through proactive and reactive cleansing operation and through enforcement'.*
- 31 The service plan for 2005/06 links up the service's activities to the Council's overall broad priorities, although this is very much organised around the activities the service delivers (such as street cleaning) and fails to make reference to the diverse range of activities the service actually undertakes. For example, the work of ROB (Recycling in Ollerton and Boughton, a local community group who provide social services sponsored training), the benefits of cleaning residential areas and the support for furniture and computer re-use schemes are not mentioned under the council's 'priority' of *'encourage economic prosperity for all'.*

### Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

#### Access and diversity

- 32 There are some good examples of community involvement and awareness of diversity issues, but the approach is inconsistent and some changes have been made without the full implications on all sections of the community being considered.

- 33 The Council has the ability to use consultation to develop its services, but has not done so consistently. It has broadened its use of consultation and has a number of methods available to consult and gauge feedback from users of its services. The Council responded to low satisfaction (with recycling) in 2000 by making recycling points more accessible and by increasing the range of materials accepted. There is a group (the Cleansing Monitoring Group) of tenants which meets every six weeks to discuss cleansing, waste and recycling related issues. The Cleansing Monitoring Group helped develop and agree the service standards for waste and cleansing.
- 34 However, the Council has not been consistent in using information from consultation to improve services. For example, despite a drop in satisfaction with the cleanliness of the district, the Council has not analysed the reason for this or worked out what needs to be done in order to improve satisfaction, even though it has ambitions to improve satisfaction in this area. This means that the Council is not aware of why people may not use its services and is not using the knowledge it has to effectively improve the services it delivers.
- 35 Access to information and the services is inconsistent and varies across the district. The *Silver book* and *Choices* newsletter both mention that '*this document is available in other formats on request*' yet provide no details on how to request other formats. Whilst there are area offices in Newark (two) and Ollerton, large parts of the district, especially the rural area to the west including the town of Southwell, have limited access to council offices. Information on the web-site is limited and it is not yet possible to book bulky waste collections or report fly tipping or abandoned vehicles online. Some links on the web-site still take the user to a blank page. Some users were frustrated by difficulties when contacting the service by telephone, and the Council's own (limited) monitoring shows a significant number of calls going unanswered or waiting a long time for an answer (although the system does not record the number of calls abandoned before being answered). This all limits the access people have to the service. However, the Council does provide an assisted collection for both the refuse and recycling services and has a clear and consistent policy that is applied for people requesting a larger than usual waste bin.
- 36 Although the majority of staff have received awareness training on diversity and equal opportunities, the Council is unable to demonstrate that these factors are routinely considered in service planning. For example, there is no evidence that diversity and access issues were robustly considered when a charge was introduced for bulky waste, or on how the charge may impact on other areas the Council is trying to support. The approach to charging is not consistent across all waste services, for example householders in receipt of benefits can receive a free home composting unit whilst others pay £10 plus VAT. However, staff are helpful and flexible, such as allowing people to pay for their bulky waste collection over a number of weeks, or pairing up nearby householders to reduce the overall charge. But these cases are exceptions to the Council's stated policy, and the Council has still not assessed the overall impact of its services on all sections of the community, and it does not routinely record information such as ethnicity or vulnerability.

This means it cannot demonstrate that the services are equally available to all sectors of the community or contribute consistently to the Council's priority areas.

### **Waste hierarchy - refuse and recycling**

- 37 The Council has a reliable refuse collection service but has not been successful in minimising the amounts of waste produced and has a disappointing track record in encouraging recycling. However it has recently introduced a new scheme which has improved the recycling of household waste.
- 38 The Council met its statutory minimum standard for recycling in 2003/04 but has missed its own targets and overall the Council's track record for recycling is disappointing. The latest available audited figures show the Council recycled just eight per cent of household waste in 2003/04. Whilst this met its statutory minimum target, it was the third worst district council in England. The Council's own data shows that it failed to meet its own target, of 18 per cent, in 2004/05, recycling just 11 per cent of household waste. However, recently rates have increased and the Council is predicting it will meet, but not exceed, its commitment as part of the Nottinghamshire public service agreement (PSA) agreement to recycle 22 per cent of household waste during 2005/06.
- 39 There has been no successful action to reduce the amount of waste produced. Although the Council continues to promote free and subsidised home composting units, supplying almost 12,000 in total, it has not attempted to evaluate whether these are efficient or effective in reducing the amounts of waste produced by householders in the district. Overall, between 2000/01 and the un-audited figures for 2004/05, total waste has increased by 11.7 per cent. This is in line with the national average, and total household waste collected by Newark and Sherwood District Council remains higher than the average for district councils in England.
- 40 Although the Council has recently focused on improving the amount of household waste recycled, it has not been consistent in making recycling available to its own staff or to businesses within the district. There is frustration amongst staff that some offices, other than Kelham Hall (the main council office), did not have recycling services available, and that even within Kelham Hall the recycling scheme was not high profile (unlike the household waste recycling service). Although the Council operates a trade waste collection service, it does not operate any form of commercial recycling service. Consequently, the Council's actions across all the waste it controls are not consistent with its stated priority to 'protect and improve the environment'.
- 41 The Council has recently been successful in increasing the amounts of waste collected for recycling. In January 2005 the Council introduced a new 'silver bin' service. This collects a range of recyclables once a fortnight, and empties the remaining waste on the alternate weeks. The service was successfully introduced with good promotion (*The silver book*) and active management has minimised the levels of contamination. Contamination levels are now very low with only a few bins not emptied and no loads of recyclables have been rejected between April and August 2005. This helps increase the amounts recycled and improves the efficiency of the service.

- 42 Recycling rates have increased, and the amount of household waste sent to landfill has reduced. Between April and July 2005 the Council sent 23 per cent of household waste for recycling. This is a significant improvement over the same period for 2004/05 but is not one of the *'leading councils in the area'* as claimed by the Council in its own publications.
- 43 The Council is successful at emptying bins and provides a reliable and respected refuse collection service. Despite the upheaval of the new recycling collection and new restructured rounds, the service is reliable and returns promptly for any bin that is missed. The Council's own monitoring shows that the number of missed bins is low and our reality checks showed that the refuse collection is not a source of litter and that, in the main, the bins were left neat after collection. In 2003/04, 88 per cent of people were satisfied with the refuse collection service.

### **Keeping the district clean**

- 44 The district is predominantly clean but this is inconsistent across the area and satisfaction with cleanliness is low. Despite well organised enforcement activities, fly tipping has increased and the Council did not meet its own target for the time to clear fly tipped waste.
- 45 The area is predominantly clean throughout the day. The Council's own monitoring shows that most of the area meets or exceeds minimum acceptable standards and our own reality checks confirmed this. Cleaning is effective in most areas, with particular emphasis on town centres, tourist areas and main routes through the district. However, there were areas where cleansing was not to the same high standard and where litter and detritus had been allowed to accumulate over a number of weeks. This means that some people are receiving a lower standard of cleanliness than the high standards achieved in most of the district.
- 46 There is an effective enforcement regime which has been successful in securing prosecutions for fly tipping. The enforcement regime is proactive and considers a range of issues, including fly tipping and abandoned vehicles, and takes an appropriate, risk-based, approach that is in line with the Council's enforcement concordat. The Council has started to take action to prevent fly tipping, such as the gating at Tolney Lane (Newark), which restricts access and reduces the opportunity for people to fly tip waste.
- 47 Despite the successful enforcement activities, the Council has not dealt with fly tipping successfully. It took longer to clear fly tipped waste than the target it set itself, taking on average almost two days to remove each instance. The number of recorded fly tipping incidents increased to 657 in 2004/05 from 580 the previous year, although data shows this has dropped to 2003/04 levels now. Whilst the Council recognises that enforcement alone will not prevent fly tipping, it has yet to develop a joined up programme covering enforcement, education and cleansing to tackle the issue robustly.
- 48 Public satisfaction with the cleanliness of the district is low. The Council has not investigated why this is the case and this limits the Council's ability to improve in this area.

- 49 The service has suffered from a lack of capacity. High absence rates have hit street cleansing particularly, as staff are often diverted from cleansing in order to complete the refuse and recycling collections. This has led to some areas not being cleaned as frequently as planned, and there is still a back log of cleansing following the introduction of the silver bin recycling service six months ago.

### **Generic environment**

- 50 The Council has set protecting and improving the environment as one of its priorities, yet its actions are inconsistent with good practice in some areas not being replicated elsewhere. Overall it has a good understanding of issues but can not demonstrate that these are used to effectively drive through improvements.
- 51 There has been significant action on reducing the amount of carbon dioxide the Council is responsible for emitting. Total emissions have been reduced by one-third since 1990, and the Council has worked with others to help them reduce their own carbon dioxide emissions. This is helping the Council reduce its impact on the environment.
- 52 The Council has taken a flexible approach which has enabled environmental innovation to be developed within the district. Sherwood Energy Village has demonstrated sustainable urban drainage and low energy design which has been incorporated into both residential and industrial properties, through supplementary planning guidance. A wide range of other developments that make a positive contribution towards improving sustainability have occurred within the district including Hockerton Housing, the autonomous house in Southwell and Millennium Green in Collingham. This helps encourage innovation and similar developments within the area.
- 53 However, environmental good practice has not become embedded in everything the Council does. There is frustration amongst staff about car travel to Kelham Hall which is located a couple of miles from Newark, although this is partly offset by the Council's green travel plan which commits to alternatives such as home working. It remains unclear how well understood this policy is within the Council. Whilst there has been a clear analysis of how the various services contribute to sustainability, the Council has not consistently taken these into consideration when making decisions. This cuts across a number of key areas relevant to this inspection, including commercial waste recycling, the role of ROB and, disappointingly, a lack of innovation in reducing the impact on the environment from the newly built depot. Financial pressures led to modern environmental innovation, such as solar heating, passive air conditioning and rainwater harvesting, being removed and the building relies on traditional heating systems even though the Council has worked closely with third parties to incorporate initiatives elsewhere within the district.

### **Is the service delivering value for money?**

- 54 The Council has taken some positive steps to improve value for money which has led to improved use of vehicles and reduced fuel use, but there is limited use of benchmarking, modern procurement is not embedded and there is a lack of clear and accurate information on which to base cost comparisons.

## 18 Environment - Waste Management | How good is the service?

- 55 Benchmarking within the service as a means to identify and review cost effectiveness is not well developed. The benchmarking that is undertaken is restricted to the best value performance indicators and limited to comparison against other Nottinghamshire districts. The robustness of this benchmarking was further weakened since the only cost driven best value indicator (for this service area) was qualified in 2003/04 because it was based on an estimate. This limits the Council's ability to identify good practice, learn from others and improve the value for money it delivers to the people in the district.
- 56 The Council has started to look at improving value for money through procurement and partnerships, but this is at an early stage. The Council is starting to examine options for improved efficiencies, such as partnerships with other waste collection authorities, but there are no proposals yet. However, the Council has procured in partnership elsewhere, for example in revenues and benefits.
- 57 Service reviews have led to some improvements in cost efficiency and effectiveness. The Council took the opportunity of the depot move to thoroughly examine all the refuse collection rounds. External consultants provide additional expertise and the rounds were organised to ensure that the maximum efficiency could be gained from the vehicles whilst minimising the distance travelled. This reduces running costs whilst ensuring flexibility that will accommodate changes in the future, such as new house building.
- 58 Capital projects have been well managed. The service has recently undergone significant change, including moving to a new depot, re-organising the complete collection rounds and implementing the move to alternate week collections. This change has been implemented efficiently, although there was a drop in cleansing standards due to capacity problems. The roll out of the alternate week collections was delivered on time and within the budget set.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

### What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 59 The Council has a mixed track record on delivering improvements in these service areas. Recycling has recently started to improve but this is against a trend which, over three years, has seen the Council's relative position slip and no consistent focus on what the Council aimed to achieve. There has been no significant improvement in cleanliness and satisfaction with cleanliness has dropped.
- 60 The Council's track record on recycling is disappointing but has recently improved. From 2002/03 the Council's recycling rate, relative to other councils, has deteriorated and in 2003/04 the Council had a recycling rate which was the third lowest compared to all other English district councils. In 2004/05 the Council missed its own target (of 18 per cent) and recycled just 11 per cent of household waste. In November 2003, the Council decided to implement a kerbside twin bin alternate week recycling collection (the 'Silver Bin' collection) and this started to be implemented from January 2005, meeting the April 2005 implementation target. There is 97 per cent coverage of the twin bin scheme and the Council's monthly current recycling rate, has fluctuated between 21 per cent and 29 per cent. The service is confident of meeting its public service agreement target for 2005/06 of 22 per cent.
- 61 The Council made improvements before implementing twin bin recycling which helped it to be successful. It analysed the collection rounds and restructured them so they would work better with the new recycling arrangements and a single depot. The service also successfully project managed the move to a single site from previous sites in Newark and Southwell to a new single site in Newark.
- 62 Good education and promotion arrangements preceded the twin bin implementation. An informative recycling guide, '*The silver book*' was sent to every household and supported by staff taking the time to explain the collection to residents when the system was first changed. Tenants and residents group representatives are happy with the recent changes to the recycling service. This is supported by the Council's own 'silver book' questionnaire, which recorded that at the end of 2004/05, 87 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the new recycling scheme. This shows that the service is capable of delivering improvements when needed.

## 20 Environment - Waste Management | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 63 The Council has improved value for money but has not tackled or made delivering value for money a key driver. It has reduced overheads by combining depot facilities, implementing alternative week collection of recyclables and residual waste and reorganising rounds to maximise vehicles and minimise distances travelled. However, costs for refuse and recycling have risen over the last three years, benchmarking has been limited and the best value indicator for cost of refuse collection was qualified by the external auditor in 2003/04.
- 64 The Council cannot demonstrate that improvement is consistent with its original aims. It originally aimed for a recycling target of 50 per cent, as it was investigating Mechanical Biological Technology (MBT), which appeared to have the potential for high recycling rates. After a long investigation into the feasibility of MBT, which eventually led to the Council deciding that it was unviable, the Council then aimed for the statutory minimum target of 8 per cent for 2003/04 and a target of 27 per cent for 2005/06. Following the introduction of the twin bin system it is now aiming to meet its county public service agreement (PSA) target of 22 per cent. The Council has reacted to external targets rather than determining a clear medium to long term strategic direction of its own with related targets. Focus on recycling has therefore been variable.
- 65 Newark and Sherwood District Council has failed to reduce the amount of waste collected. The kilograms of waste collected, per individual have continued to rise, in line with the national average, and the Council has not yet developed robust plans for waste minimisation.
- 66 There has been no significant improvement in cleanliness across the district. User satisfaction with cleanliness has declined from 62 per cent in 2000/01 to 54 per cent in 2003/04, and declined relative to other councils. The Council has not carried out research into why this is, but has concluded that there is a need to make the cleansing service more visible. The Council can point to cleanliness improvement in Boughton and better bin provision in laybys, but does not have a strategy to improve cleanliness for the whole community even though it was identified as an important service area for the public.

### **How well does the service manage performance?**

- 67 Performance management is not yet embedded and its effectiveness is hindered by the lack of clear priorities which effectively means the Council is trying to maintain and improve everything it does. There is no clear vision for the Service and no clear improvement plan although service plans are explicit for the twelve months they relate to.
- 68 The Council does not have a clear vision for the Service, and there is no clear improvement plan. It established five wide-ranging priorities in 2004/05 including 'to protect and improve the environment', which relates to recycling and cleansing. However, it is unclear which corporate priority is the most important or how different services or outcomes rank within each priority area. The Council's partners did not know what the Council's priorities were. This weakens the Council's ability to plan for sustained improvements in conjunction with others. It also limits its ability to allocate resources in line with improvement planning, such as for recycling education and promotion, and other priorities.

- 69 The service lacks corporate direction partly due to the lack of prioritisation at strategic level. This means that services work individually rather than to a common agenda and lines of communication tend to be service based, with a lack of integration of service plans across council services. Although there are some working groups, for example knowledge management and asset management, there is limited sharing of best practice across services, and this depends on committed individuals taking the initiative rather than formal arrangements. For example, there is no corporate enforcement strategy or any formal arrangements to share enforcement knowledge.
- 70 The Council does not have a clear improvement plan with aims and priorities for the future for waste collection and recycling. The Council's Waste Management Strategy is essentially an options appraisal which is helpful in outlining a range of possible future actions on recycling. The Council has not made corporate policy decisions about what is important, for example what materials it may wish to recycle in future, or the role of Recycling Ollerton and Boughton (ROB), and negotiated with the county council in line with its policy decisions. This is planned for autumn 2005. The Council feels that it will then be in a position to develop an improvement plan. This means that at present the Council's intentions about future recycling policy are not clear.
- 71 Although the Council has started a 'hit squad' to address cleansing in rural areas, it has not developed a cleansing strategy to address user satisfaction, and does not know if the future extra financial provision of £50,000 a year will be adequate. Consequently, it is not clear whether the community will notice any difference.
- 72 Engagement with users is not comprehensive. The Council has no clear policy on customer service and is in the early stages of developing consultation mechanisms, and has recently put in place a Citizens' Panel, but does not have arrangements to consult with rural groups or hard to reach groups. The Service meets regularly with the Cleansing Monitoring Group, composed of representatives of tenants and representatives groups, who provide useful feedback on a very local basis. They were involved in helping the Council determine customer service standards for cleansing and waste collection. The group does not provide balanced feedback from the district as a whole, however as it represents a limited number of communities. This means the service makes improvements in response to feedback from certain communities where others are not represented.
- 73 Performance management is not embedded. The Council has reviewed its corporate basket of performance indicators and the service has local indicators. The Council plans to report performance against service plan objectives in the next quarterly round of monitoring, and there are plans to align service performance and financial performance reporting. However, there is limited evidence of timely remedial action and of community focus. For example, while the Council has signed up to the Enforcement Concordat, it does not report its own performance against it, so the community cannot judge how well it is doing.

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- 74 The Council does not evaluate its action formally and does not maximise its learning from review. For example, it did not fully evaluate its decisions when it pursued options for waste separate from the county council. Consequently it has missed an opportunity to learn what went wrong or how it could successfully encourage innovation in the future. The Council is still not using evaluation as a tool to learn and achieve improvement. For example, even though there was a project plan for the twin bin roll-out, there has been no post project evaluation which could have identified good practice that the Council could use elsewhere in service and project planning.
- 75 However, the service has clear plans for the short term - to meet PSA targets and to address the county council's waste management private finance initiative (PFI). The service plan makes linkages to the broad corporate aims and includes some of the right things - for example, waste education in schools and ensuring a better outcome on rural cleansing by co-ordinating it with county highways grounds maintenance, and to address the remaining households without recycling facilities.
- 76 Service managers showed leadership in managing the change to twin bin recycling which was implemented across the whole of the district at the same time. Managers learned from other council's experiences, for example Project Integra in Hampshire, other Nottinghamshire districts and St. Edmundsbury. Staff and councillors also showed strong commitment to improvement. The service learned from staff suggestions, for example by involving staff in the re-routing of refuse rounds and from customers via the Cleansing Monitoring group, such as the development of new service standards. And the staff worked together effectively to ensure the successful change to alternate week collections. This shows that the will to improve exists within the service.
- 77 The Council is in the early stages of monitoring and setting targets for value for money, but understands the benefits of the tendering process and working with others. There is an 'in principle' understanding that the Council will explore partnership arrangements for these services at some point, particularly where it is more economical in the bordering areas of districts. The Council is actively involved in seeking better procurement arrangements and has now joined the county's purchasing arrangements for energy.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 78 Capacity is mixed although the Council has recently invested in recycling. The Council is improving its training arrangements and sickness absence is reducing.
- 79 ICT provision is not yet adding to the Service's capacity. For example, telephone access information is not optimised and there is a lack of integration between some systems. Interactive forms are not in place on the website, although there are plans to improve this in the near future. The Council has not determined corporate development of CRM, which has the potential to get information to the customer quickly by phone, face to face or on line and share capacity to answer queries amongst a range of service. This limits the Service's customer service capacity.

- 80 Overview and scrutiny is not fully effective. The Council has researched ways to improve and has recently introduced a partnerships/external relations scrutiny panel. However, councillors agree that it could help more in providing ideas and guidance for service improvement.
- 81 The corporate procurement strategy is not embedded and the Council is still exploring options. The Council's approach to partnerships is changing although there is a concern that this new approach will require some political commitment if it means changes to services. However, the Council can show some evidence of joint procurement in the past, with neighbouring Nottinghamshire councils for Revenues and Benefits services in 2003. There is a growing awareness of green procurement but this is not embedded in tender evaluation. This means that sustainability is not automatically taken into account when making procurement decisions.
- 82 There is limited evidence of the Council's ability to attract external funding to these services. For example, the service has received DEFRA funding in order to develop a waste management strategy, but it was unsuccessful in attracting funding for its twin bin implementation.
- 83 The Council has no workforce development plan as yet and cannot develop full human resources (HR) or financial planning arrangements for these services as the Council has not determined what approach it will take under the county PFI. However, the Council has mainstreamed the additional costs of its existing recycling arrangements into its medium term financial plan, although the ongoing investment of £50,000 for street cleansing is less certain.
- 84 The Council can demonstrate that it has reduced sickness absence and this is reflected in the Service. During 2003/04, levels of sickness absence were at 10.77 days per employee for the Council and 12.75 days for the Service. For the first quarter of 2005/06 this was 2.04 days for the Council (projected to 8.08 days over the year) and 2.26 days per employee in the Service (nine days over the course of the year.) This improvement is important in boosting capacity because if waste collection staff are sick, cleansing staff are diverted to waste collection even though the Council acknowledges that this has an adverse effect on the cleanliness of the district.
- 85 Work on developing human resource capacity has started, and the Council is investing in training and performance review. It has a corporate training plan. This addresses key skills to improve the Council's capacity such as management skills, customer service skills and performance management skills such as project management, procurement, target setting and service planning. In response to staff survey feedback it has successfully re-launched the appraisal process, and individuals are now more familiar with how their work contributes to the service and the organisation. In the waste collection, recycling and cleansing services, staff are clear what is expected of them through the appraisals process and the 'permit to work' system represents good practice in assessing training needs.

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- 86** The Council is building its capacity to ensure value for money. It has carried out efficiency review workshops and is aiming for a balanced portfolio of efficiency review projects. This will help the Council focus on areas of service with potential for productivity gains with improved outcomes rather than cutting services.