

Planning Inspection

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

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Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission 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 co-ordination 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 (KLOEs) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's web site at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

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

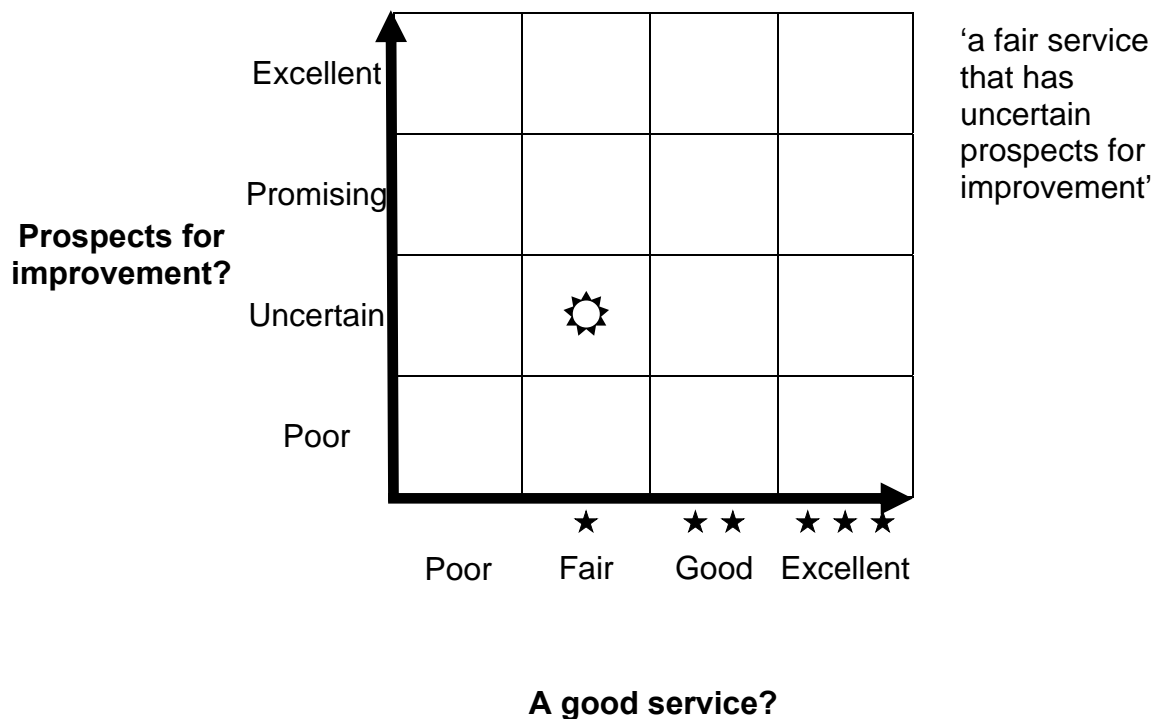
Summary

- 1 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council is a district council located in the north east of Warwickshire. The population is just over 120,300, centred in the towns of Nuneaton and Bedworth. The black and ethnic minority population constitute 6.5 per cent.
- 2 The Council is Labour-led with 22 of the 34 seats.
- 3 The Council employs approximately 700 staff across all services.
- 4 The inspection assessed how effectively and efficiently the Council services are contributing towards the protection sustenance and enhancement of the borough's physical and natural and built environment. This includes the strategic framework and service delivery of the following services: waste and planning.
- 5 The 2005/06 budget for the waste and planning services is £4 million. In addition, the service received a planning delivery grant of £190,868.

Scoring the service

- 6 We have assessed Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service which has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Table 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

- 7 The service is a fair, one-star service because:
- the Council is successfully protecting the local environment through conservation of the greenbelt and identification of housing outside the greenbelt;
 - the Local Plan 2005 clearly reflects national policies on sustainability;
 - recycling has improved and is on schedule to meet the Council's statutory target;
 - the borough is generally well-swept and free from large accumulations of litter;

¹ 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.

- access to the service is available through a range of methods, for example the website improved and a number of online facilities are available;
- the range of communication methods and consultation is adequate and improving; and
- the Council is helping ensure local developments are designed to avoid crime, in partnership with police.

8 However:

- despite recent significant improvement over the last three years the Council is failing to meet some national planning targets;
- satisfaction with the service is mixed;
- the Council cannot demonstrate value for money in the service;
- there is limited ongoing engagement with users of the service;
- there is a lack of published information and performance against service standards;
- the Council is not effectively addressing waste minimisation;
- the Council's approach to addressing the diversity agenda is at an early stage and as yet there are few outcomes:
 - DDA compliance is at only 50 per cent;
 - below average checklist score for addressing equality; and
 - no concessionary charging policy;
- waste and planning enforcement is underdeveloped and not proactive; and
- despite having good initiatives, the Council has a limited structured approach to waste education.

9 The service has uncertain prospects for improvement because although:

- the Council's local planning policy and aims for community involvement in the planning process show clear ambitions for the future;
- significant recent but unaudited performance improvement in planning and recycling and satisfaction;
- the Council is strengthening its corporate strategic planning systems; and
- the Council shows clear commitment to working in partnership across Warwickshire in the services for example with North Warwickshire District Council in building control and Warwickshire County Council and districts in developing a waste management strategy.

10 However:

- the Council has lacked pace to establish sustained focus and consistent improvement in both services identified as weak at CPA;
- the Council has no long-term vision for waste management in the borough and minimisation is deteriorating;

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- improvement mainly driven by external pressures and targets;
- inconsistent track record in delivering improvement in the service; and
- whilst service planning is developing and improving it still has weaknesses around target and outcome setting and action planning.

Recommendations

- 11 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 costs² 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.

Recommendation

R1 By October 2006, develop longer-term vision for the service to support the national and local agendas. This should include:

- *clear objectives;*
- *public facing, clear and challenging targets with quantified measurable outcomes; and*
- *SMART action plans.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved clarity on the direction of the service; and
- increased likelihood of improvement of service delivery.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.

Recommendation

R2 By October 2006, develop a clear strategy to improve waste minimisation to include:

- *clear reduction targets;*
- *SMART implementation plans; and*
- *monitoring methods.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- improved performance in line with national waste minimisation and sustainability agenda.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs.

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 percent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R3 By March 2007, develop and implement systems to support the monitoring review and improvement in value for money of the service. To include:

- *benchmarking of service cost and performance and establishing a baseline assessment of value for money; and*
- *exploring options for improving value for money through targeting areas of high cost and or poor performance.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- better use of resources;
- clarity around comparative cost of service; and
- ability to demonstrate value for money of the service to the public.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.

Recommendation

R4 By October 2006, develop outcome-focused service standards and make these readily available to the public. To include:

- *target response times for service requests established through user engagement; and*
- *monitoring and reporting methods for performance measurement to include ongoing engagement with user groups.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- public clarity on service expectations; and
- improved performance of service response through ongoing monitoring and review.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs.

Recommendation

R5 As an ongoing approach, the Council needs to ensure a suitable balance between planning speed and quality such that whilst it meets the statutory application turnaround time this is not at the expense of service quality in relation to pre-application advice.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- maintenance of improved application turnaround times in accordance with statutory requirements; and
- service quality which meets user requirements.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs.

Report

Context

The locality

- 12 Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council is located in the north east of Warwickshire, within easy commuting distance of the major conurbations of Coventry, Leicester and Birmingham. It covers some 30 square miles, with a population of just over 120,300, centred in the towns of Nuneaton and Bedworth. 20.4 per cent of the population is under the age of 15 and 15.3 per cent is aged over 65. The black and ethnic minority population constitutes 6.5 per cent which is well below the regional figure of 13.8 per cent.
- 13 The national deprivation index ranks Nuneaton and Bedworth as 123 out of 354 in the country, where 1 signifies the most deprived council. Almost 83 per cent of properties are in the council tax bands A to C, compared to 76 per cent regionally. The average house sales price in 2005 was £131,108 compared to £165,424 regionally.
- 14 Unemployment, at 1.9 per cent, is the same as the regional average. However, the average gross weekly pay is £351, compared to £365 regionally and £402 nationally.
- 15 Key crime indicators in the borough are above average in relation to the national picture, particularly motor vehicle thefts and domestic burglaries. Literacy and numeracy levels are lower than the national averages. Life expectancy rates are lower than both the regional and national averages.
- 16 The Council comprises 34 councillors, 22 Labour, 11 Conservative and 1 Liberal Democrat. The elections in June 2004 resulted in a slightly reduced majority for the ruling party. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council has adopted a leader and cabinet model, together with three overview and scrutiny committees, three regulatory committees and a standards committee.
- 17 The Council employs 709 full-time equivalent staff. It has a net General Fund revenue budget of £16 million for 2005/06, together with a General Fund capital programme of £3.386 million. It has also been successful in accessing additional funding.

The Council's planning and waste services

- 18 The comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) carried out in 2004 identified a number of areas of poor performance in major services including the speed of dealing with planning applications, poor recycling performance and waste minimisation.

- 19** Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council was made a planning standards authority (PSA) for 2004/05 because of its performance on major applications from July 2002 to June 2003. The Council is a PSA for 2005/06 for its performance on major and minor applications. The Council will not be a PSA for 2006/07.
- 20** The purpose of the inspection was to assess how effectively and efficiently the services are contributing towards the protection sustenance and enhancement of the borough's physical and natural and built environment. This includes the delivery of the following services (hereafter referred to as 'the service'):
- waste; and
 - planning.
- 21** Given the strategic nature of the inspection consideration of the detailed operational aspects of the services listed below was limited to the degree to which they contribute to the Council's strategic aims for the management of the environment. Therefore the inspection did not include detailed examination of the operational aspects of:
- development control;
 - building control;
 - refuse collection; and
 - street cleaning.
- 22** The service inspected has 54 full-time equivalent staff (environmental health, and planning) and 161 full-time equivalent staff (public amenities) that deliver the planning and waste services. The service budget for 2005/06 was £4 million made up in the following way:
- development and building control £637,430 (including £981,140 income);
 - refuse and cleansing £2,479,560; and
 - recycling £881,290.
- 23** In addition, the service received a planning delivery grant of £75,000 in 2003/04, £84,375 in 2004/05 and a further £190,868 in 2005/06.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 24 Community needs and priorities are identified in the community plan '*Shaping our Future*' and the Council's corporate plan both of which have been informed by public consultation with the Council's people's panel, partners, stakeholders, and elected members.
- 25 The community plan identifies eight key themes where the local strategic partnership (LSP) have given priority and actions it intends to take to address them. The eight themes are:
- community and involvement;
 - health welfare and housing;
 - community safety and crime;
 - lifelong learning;
 - economy and employment;
 - town centres;
 - natural and built environment; and
 - transport and access.
- 26 The Council's vision as identified in its corporate plan is 'Our ambition is to continually improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the community of Nuneaton and Bedworth working with and on behalf of the community to achieve excellence'. The corporate plan contains 12 outward facing objectives based on the community plan themes and six inward looking objectives dealing with the internal mechanisms necessary to help the Council achieve its outward facing objectives. The objectives have been written around four key themes.
- Social wellbeing:
 - develop a sustainable, fairer and socially inclusive community;
 - target poverty and disadvantage;
 - provide improved housing;
 - sustainable, affordable and accessible recreation and cultural services;
 - promote healthier lifestyles; and
 - reduce crime, disorder and fear of crime.
 - Economic wellbeing:
 - improve skills and knowledge;
 - promote a thriving and balanced economy; and
 - develop the town centres.

- Environmental wellbeing:
 - enhance the natural and built environment;
 - promote good environmental practices; and
 - help develop a sustainable and safe transport system.
 - Excellent services:
 - provide effective leadership to deliver services;
 - ensure policies and plans are kept up-to-date;
 - develop motivated, skilled, representative and valued employees;
 - provide services using resources and partnerships in line with priorities and best value;
 - develop maintain and review services; and
 - encourage and improve community involvement in the Council's services.
- 27** The Council's Local Agenda 21 environmental policy is contained within the community plan and identifies the LSP's aim to work together to improve the sustainability of the borough. The community plan partnership team (CPPT), which acts as the operational group for the community plan, is made up of representatives from all the LSP organisations, the co-ordinating officers of the plans eight key themes, organisations, community groups and individuals who have an interest or stake in the plan. The CPPT identifies its responsibility to the sustainable future of Nuneaton and Bedworth and its inhabitants in the community plan.
- 28** Aims and objectives for waste management and cleansing in the borough are outlined in the high level improvement plan (HLIP), the public amenities service development plan (SDP), and Warwickshire's municipal waste strategy (WMWS). They are:
- achieve recycling rate of 24 per cent by March 2006 (HLIP);
 - to manage public areas so they are safe, clean and green (SDP); and
 - to encourage residents and businesses to manage their waste and be more environmentally sustainable by reduction, re-use and recycling (SDP).
- 29** The Council has adopted the WMWS and therefore has adopted the associated objectives. Briefly, these include the following which are applicable to the borough:
- reduce waste produced;
 - aim to achieve 40 to 45 per cent recycling rate by 2009/10;
 - divert waste from landfill; and
 - treat residual waste using thermal systems.

- 30 The Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Local Plan 1993 is the current adopted local plan setting out the land use policies and proposals for the borough. It is now out-of-date and does not fully reflect more recent local, regional or national priorities. The Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Local Plan 2005 adoption has suffered from two major delays. Due to a high court challenge to the adoption of the Warwickshire Structure Plan the Council was not able to put the first draft on deposit and then, following the first public inquiry held in 2003, further work was recommended regarding Area of Restraint. This resulted in the appointment of a consultant to carry out the work and a second inquiry taking place. The Council estimates that these delays have added around two years onto the process. Local Plan modifications were published in March 2005 covering the period 2001/11 and the Plan is expected to be adopted in the summer of 2006.
- 31 The Local Plan 2005 clearly contains policies that reflect national planning priorities relating to sustainability, particularly in respect of issues such as design, climate change and conservation. The plan contains, for example, sections on:
- development in areas of flood risk is not allowed unless appropriate measures to mitigate the risk have been taken;
 - design and layout of new residential properties should address energy efficiency through design and layout;
 - the prevention of development and other land use changes that are likely to affect rare, endangered species of nature conservation importance;
 - to ensure that all major development is required to allow for recycling facilities of various types; and
 - the prevention of development which results in demand for water that cannot be adequately met or affects the quality in watercourses and groundwater.
- 32 Development Control aim to implement the Local Plan policies whilst meeting national turnaround targets for planning applications.
- 33 In line with national requirements policies also include a stipulation for transport assessments to be made with any application likely to have significant transport implications. These will need to demonstrate how sustainable transport can be encouraged and identify any contributions towards public provision. A green travel plan may also be required, together with any contributions sought subject to negotiations and obligations.
- 34 The Council has responded well to changes in the planning process which replaces local plans and the regional structure plan with a local development framework (LDF) and regional spatial strategies. A local development scheme has been agreed with the Government Office of the West Midlands and a draft Statement of Community Involvement was formally submitted for approval and put on deposit for six weeks at the end of January 2005.

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

Access, customer care and user and/or community focus

- 35** The Council is striving to put the needs of the citizen and users at the heart of the service. It has made significant progress, but has not yet achieved that aim and recognises the weaknesses that need to be overcome.
- 36** The Council is committed to involving users and citizens in service design. Consultation is adequate and improving. The Council has a 'people's panel' to facilitate feedback on services and there has recently been an open debate with councillors on the subject of waste management. There are clear examples of where the Council responds appropriately to feedback. It is now considering the viability of recycling cardboard and plastics following consultation.
- 37** The Council utilises a variety of methods to engage with the public and stakeholders in the preparation of planning policy. The planning inspectorate has commended the Council in its willingness and common sense approach to concede valid points made by objectors to the borough's Local Plan which has resulted in it being progressively improved and refined throughout the consultative process. In preparation for the Council's Statement of Community Involvement a number of consultation exhibitions were held across the borough in addition to questionnaire consultations with a variety of stakeholders, groups and individuals which has resulted in the consultation groups' database and the way that the Council publicises planning applications being amended.
- 38** There is limited systematic ongoing engagement with users of the service. The planning service does not engage on an ongoing basis with users of the service to influence future service delivery or to ensure that the standard of service and delivery meet their needs. There is no regular planning user or waste forum to inform service delivery and it is unclear how particular 'hard-to-reach groups' across the borough have been approached to secure their views on service delivery. There has, however been some ongoing engagement with young people and older residents groups on general council wide issues.
- 39** The Council is using public participation at planning committees well to ensure that the public have good opportunity to input to planning decisions. Public speaking at the Council's planning committee meetings is well used with many meetings being full. Due to this popularity and limited control over number and times allowed for objectors in the past, changes have recently been made to limit the number of objectors that can speak and also the time each is allowed. A waiting room has also been set up to maximise the public room available at the planning committee meetings. To further enhance the public's participation in these meetings the Council has plans to upgrade the audio and visual facilities within the Council Chamber.

- 40 Physical access to the planning system is mixed with the balance between speed and quality a concern. Agents have reported that whilst access to pre-application advice is better than other neighbouring councils contacted, some problems are still experienced including, difficulties in arranging meetings with specific planning officers and due to 'target chasing' it has become more difficult to speak to people. The quality of pre-application advice is also sometimes inconsistent as junior officers are more often used than experienced officers as in the past. One agent kept a rota of the duty officers to pick and chose when to contact the Council. To help improve physical access the planning reception has been re-located to the ground floor, made more welcoming and a range of planning information and leaflets displayed for public use.
- 41 It is easy to contact the service by several media. This can be achieved by telephone, mail and on line and was confirmed by users we spoke to. The Council's website has improved and a number of online facilities are available, for example problems such as missed collections, littering fly-tipping and complaints and comments can be submitted. Services such as bulky waste collections can be requested and payments made. Planning applications can be viewed online. From 2003/04 to 2004/05 the Council has increased the number of e-enabled services from 63 to 71 per cent but this still remains below average performance. The national Pendleton survey of planning websites scores websites using 21 criteria, with the higher the score the better the website in terms of planning services. This survey indicated that Nuneaton and Bedworth scored 15 out of 21 in 2004 which is below average and this has remained the same in 2005 due to no further online functionality having been added.
- 42 The Council has a range of ways to communicate with service users and citizens. There is the Council magazine 'In Touch' which is clear and informative. There is a special edition devoted to waste management issues which is comprehensive in the range of information included. There is information on the web site about recycling, composting and waste collection arrangements. Collection and recycling information is also available on posters which are secured to bins and recycling boxes, and front line staff leave specially designed leaflets to remind users of the correct way to recycle when householders get it wrong.
- 43 The Council is committed to making key documents accessible to all groups. Documents and information are available in large print and there is a translation service available on request. The Council subscribes to Language Line services to assist residents and users whose first language is not English. This is supported by staff training and details are available in the 'customer first' leaflet. Some documents such as the service development plans are also available on audio tapes. Documents are available in Braille through an arrangement with the Warwickshire Association for the Blind.

- 44 The Council has made access to recycling very convenient for householders. It has rolled out weekly recycling collections to 95 per cent of households. This is the whole of the borough apart from blocks of flats and sheltered housing. It is currently providing these remaining properties with 'mini recycling' facilities, so that every household will have kerbside recycling facilities on a weekly basis. This includes a wide range of recyclables and green waste for composting nine months of the year.
- 45 The Council has failed to set clear and explicit service standards. Whilst there is adequate information on waste management such as, the frequency of collection and recycling information and planning opening times and access, there are no explicit target times for responding to service requests such as littering, fly tipping, dog fouling, missed collections and planning enforcement response. The Council therefore is unable to measure and publish its performance in respect of responding to service requests.

Diversity

- 46 The Council is committed to addressing diversity issues but progress has been slow and performance is mixed in relation to fair and equal access for all groups. It has an equality and diversity policy in place which was issued in September 2002. This provides a framework for the development of diversity in the Council. Disability audits have been undertaken for all key services across the Council. The Council's score against the checklist for progress for promoting race equality is below average. Only 50 per cent of council buildings have full disability access according to the Council's own unaudited data, and there is a target to achieve 75 per cent over the next three years. But the Council has missed the 2004 deadline for compliance of all its public buildings.
- 47 The Council has achieved level 2 for the local government equalities standard. There are plans to achieve level 3 by 2007. The Council has a below average score on the checklist on promoting race equality.
- 48 The service strives to improve access to all. For example residents with disabilities and other special needs can arrange to have their refuse collected from their back doors and clinical waste is collected free of charge from all households who use the service. This is on a weekly basis.
- 49 Cost of some services is a potential barrier to some needy groups. The Council does not have a charging policy in relation to its waste service and there are no concessionary rates for those with limited income, for example the same charge is made for the bulky waste service regardless of financial background. This does not support the Council's policy of targeting poverty and disadvantage and developing a sustainable, fairer and socially inclusive community.
- 50 Diversity, equality and customer care training is provided for all staff. The Council has a policy to provide this training in line with need related to the nature of the post. This is based on input at least every three years. There was some inconsistency in this approach as several staff we spoke to had not received this training.

- 51 The Council has made a sustained effort to engage with hard-to-reach groups. These include meetings and debates with the older residents and young people. Some of these forums are regularly scheduled, but more has to be achieved before the Council has active engagement with all hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups.

Service outcomes for users and the community

Waste management

- 52 The Council's performance in waste management is improving significantly but is still weak in several key areas. It has been slow to address the waste agenda. For example, it failed to achieve the first statutory recycling target for 2003/04, but has made some important improvements to recycling recently. The Council has achieved 21 per cent recycling performance in 2004/2005 and it considers that it is on track to meet its statutory target of 24 per cent for 2005/06. During 2004/05 Nuneaton and Bedworth was placed sixth out of the 38 councils in the West Midlands region in relation to improvement in recycling.
- 53 Service standards for waste management have not been set. The Council is therefore unable to judge how effective its waste collection service is performing. It does not compile, monitor and report performance on missed collections. Satisfaction with the collection service as recorded in BVPI is 84 per cent and is below average. But recent unaudited data provided by the Council indicates a significant rise and improvement in satisfaction to 93 per cent. This could be the result of recent improvements made to the service such as weekly recycling collections.
- 54 The Council makes it very easy for local residents to recycle their waste. There is a weekly recycling collection to all individual homes - 95 per cent of households in the borough. The remainder are flats and housing complexes such as sheltered housing. The Council is committed to providing convenient recycling facilities to all households and is rolling out the installation of mini recycling facilities at all these premises (about 100). A wide range of items can be recycled including paper, glass, metal, textiles, oil and batteries, and green waste for composting - all from the kerbside.
- 55 The improvements to the recycling facilities are not yet reflected in the BVPI data. In 2003/04 satisfaction with recycling facilities was recorded as 62 per cent - in the worst quartile. This was a fall from the 2000/01 level of 68 per cent. However, recent unaudited data provided by the Council shows a significant improvement to a level of 80 per cent.
- 56 The Council delivers a low cost bulky waste service to all residents. This enables residents to conveniently dispose of large items of waste from their premises. It is easy to access by telephone or can be arranged and paid for on line. The cost is £15 for up to five items.

- 57** Minimisation is an area of significant weakness. Despite a range of initiatives, such as re-use schemes for furniture and white goods; not taking side waste and not emptying overflowing bins, performance is in the worst quartile. The latest BVPI indicates levels of waste per head at 473 kilograms in 2004/05, rising from 445 kilograms the previous year. The latest unaudited data from the Council indicates that this level has risen to over 520 kilograms per head. In 2003, the Council reduced the collection rate for residual waste from weekly to fortnightly. This could have systematically reduced the amount of residual waste collected and would have encouraged recycling. The Council moved back to weekly collections after a few months as the result of public opinion and therefore missed an opportunity to improve minimisation.
- 58** The Council's education and awareness raising function to minimise waste and increase recycling is developing. There is a clear commitment to improve education and awareness of waste minimisation and recycling. Extra resources are being invested, for example, a new post has been established. Education and awareness raising is the main tactic used by the Council to encourage recycling and drive down the level of waste collected. It is therefore vital that it is effective. There are a wide range of approaches and initiatives deployed to achieve these aims. These include working with schools, talks and visits, publicity and home visits. The Council also works with Warwickshire County Council's waste awareness service and supports national campaigns. These new resources have been established fairly recently so it is too soon to assess their effectiveness. It is clear that staff involved are capable and committed and are keen to move to a more structured and proactive approach to education, for example with a targeted programme and measured outcomes.

Cleansing

- 59** The borough is generally well-swept and free from large accumulations of litter. But there are some weaknesses in certain hot spots. This was evident from reality checks.
- 60** The Council has not been able to objectively assess its level of performance in street cleansing. Monitoring of performance against EPA standards and to determine the performance indicator for cleanliness has been a weakness. The Council has not been carrying out the necessary programmed sampling and inspections due to a lack of staffing capacity. This has recently been rectified and nine months of inspection data is available. This data indicates that an acceptable standard of cleansing has been achieved consistent with a rating of 'B' overall. This is, however, unaudited data.
- 61** Public satisfaction with the cleansing services is poor, but shows recent signs of improvement (unaudited). The latest satisfaction levels measured for the BVPI were 54 per cent and in the worst quartile in 2003/04. This is worsening of performance from the 2000/01 level of 66 per cent. However, recent data provided by the Council indicates an improvement to 58 per cent. These figures are unaudited.

- 62 The Council provides a response to a wide range of cleansing problems. These include fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, dog fouling, removing dead animals, graffiti, fly posters and requests for litter bins, extra bins for waste and recyclates and missed collections. It is unable to readily and accurately determine how responsive it is to these requests. It has not set response rates targets as standards for the service and currently does not compile, monitor and report response rates.
- 63 Enforcement is underdeveloped. This is recognised by the Council and action is being taken to improve this area. Currently there is some effective enforcement activity in respect of dog fouling. Two dog wardens are proactive and have issued over 20 spot fines. There has also been a high profile prosecution for dog fouling which has acted as a deterrent. The Council also investigates fly tipping incidents and carries out some discreet surveillance of fly tipping hot spots, but with no outcomes. The Council is currently building on this experience and is considering extending enforcement activities to all areas of waste management, but until this is in place, this is an area of weakness.

Planning

- 64 The Council is successfully protecting the local environment. Recent examples of where applications have been refused due to their potential impact on the openness of the adjoining greenbelt and the refusal of an application for a telecommunications mast because of its visual impact on the greenbelt which had the appeal dismissed. The new local plan has identified sufficient housing land to meet local housing need up until 2011 thereby minimising the need to develop in the greenbelt.
- 65 Planning enforcement is developing. The Council has a General Enforcement Policy in place and has increased resources in planning enforcement to support a more proactive approach than that has traditionally been taken. Enforcement is not supported by publicised service response standards.
- 66 The Council's Annual Monitoring Report published in November 2005 indicates that 58 per cent of its new dwellings were built at more than 50 dwellings per hectare; 31 per cent were at 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare and the remaining 11 per cent were built at less than 30 dwellings per hectare. This compares well with a target of between 30 and 50 dwellings set out in the ODPM's *Planning Policy Guideline 3 - Housing*. The Local Plan proposed modifications 2005 states that a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare will be sought on all sites and density above 50 will be considered for housing provision that can lend it self to high density such as sheltered housing for the elderly. Audited data indicates the percentage of new homes built on brownfield sites (sites that have previously been developed) in 2003/04 was 85 per cent and in 2004/05 was 71 per cent against a national target of 60 per cent. This again helps the Council to protect the greenbelt within the borough.

- 67 The Council has a number of policies to guide development and protect the environment. The Local Plan 2005 clearly contains policies that reflect national planning priorities relating to sustainability, particularly in respect of issues such as design, climate change and conservation. Examples of this are; the Camp Hill Urban village which will include a community centre, employment use land and public open spaces, Eliot Park energy efficient building design and the promotion of public transport use through the issue of free bus passes to employees when the building was first opened. Much of the Council's supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is dated, with a number dating back to the mid-1990s. However, the key SPG, Residential Design Guide, Shopfronts and Advertisements Design Guide and Car Parking Standards have been updated in 2003 and 2004 and reflect national or other priorities. The Car Parking Standards guidance for example gives local guidance on the maximum car spaces for each type of dwelling and also clearly states that all developments should conform to the local plan and national Planning guidance PPG3 at an average of 1.5 car spaces per dwelling. This helps promote the use of public transport and also the overall sustainability of new developments.
- 68 The Council is securing a variety of developer contributions. The Local Plan 2005 identifies a number of contributions that will be secured by section 106 obligations and makes this clear to developers what the Council's justification and expectations are. Various contributions have been secured by the Council and also with Warwickshire County Council through 106 agreements. Some specific examples have been at the Heath development at Bedworth and Black Bank also at Bedworth. At these developments monies have been secured for improvements to parking land at a local shopping centre, £150,000 for community facilities, laying out of a former Mineral Railway line through the site as a footpath/cycleway, open space contributions, the development and maintenance of a pool and freehold transfer to the Wildlife Trust. The sensible use of section 106 contributions is clearly benefiting the local community.
- 69 The Council is successfully working with the local police to help plan out crime in new developments. The Architectural Police Liaison Officer is sent a copy of the weekly list of planning applications and through agreement formally consulted on all residential developments over ten houses to obtain advice on potential crime issues. Examples of changes made as a result of this work include the addition of a boundary wall and close boarded fences to a three-story development of flats and the moving of a cycle store from an external to an internal location, potentially vulnerable footpaths removed from individual sites. All major applications are now required to submit a statement of security with their applications in line with Policy Env22 of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Local Plan Modifications 2005.

- 70 The Council is successfully delivering on the local provision of employment land. The Warwickshire Structure Plan sets a target of 132 hectares of employment land to be developed during the plan period. At April 2005, 87 hectares had already been developed and other sites identified taking the figure up to 127 hectares (96.2 per cent). Regional Planning Guidance identifies Solihull/Coventry/Warwick crescent as a corridor for high technology firms recognising the past investment and attractiveness of that area for such uses. In view of the borough's proximity to Coventry and the potential for benefiting from this type of employment Nuneaton and Bedworth and Coventry City Council have jointly commissioned a consultant to undertake a sub-regional employment land review to help feed into the Regional Spatial Strategy revision. This work will help in the identification of a regional investment site of 40 to 50 hectares in the Regeneration zone of Coventry and Nuneaton.
- 71 The Council is failing to consistently meet some national targets. Over the last three years the Council's performance in relation to meeting planning application turn around times has been mixed which has resulted in it being designated as a planning standards authority (PSA) in two separate years. The Council was made a PSA for 2004/05 because of its performance on major applications from July 2002 to June 2003. The Council is a PSA for 2005/06 for its performance on major and minor applications. It has since taken corrective action to improve this situation and to meet the statutory targets of the determination of 60 per cent of major applications in 13 weeks; 65 per cent of minor applications in 8 weeks and 80 per cent of other applications in 8 weeks. Audited data for 2004/05 indicates that performance was 63 per cent, 50 per cent and 79 per cent respectively. More recent unaudited data indicates significant improvements of 79 per cent; 78 per cent and 98 per cent respectively. A large contribution to this improvement has been the increase of the proportion of planning delegations from around 70 to 87 per cent. This has also contributed in an improvement in the proportion of planning appeals upheld falling from 50 per cent to around 25 per cent.
- 72 The Council is helping minimise flooding through following the Environment Agency's guidelines and advice. The borough has areas which fall within the Flood Plain and a major flood relief scheme was carried out in the area at the end of the 1970s which has resulted in only localised flooding taking place since that time. Flood plain maps are received from the Environment Agency every six months and attached to the Local Plan. The Agency is a statutory consultee on planning applications and there is an agreed protocol in place on the types of applications and areas where consultation is needed.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 73 The Council is unable to demonstrate value for money in the delivery of its waste and planning services. This is because there is no systematic approach to the monitoring and review of VFM. There is a lack of information on cost comparisons and benchmarking of costs with other councils. However, there are some examples of where the Council has gained efficiencies and achieved value for money in service delivery.

- 74 The Council cannot demonstrate value for money in the provision of its planning services. Planning services costs alone compare well in relation to other councils with the Council's spend per head on planning being well within the cheapest quartile nationally. Despite this when compared to the relative BVPI performance over the last three years in relation to the turn around time for planning applications and fluctuating satisfaction levels, the value for money has been poor. This situation is improving since the Council has managed to increase its planning application performance and the service costs have not had a correspondingly significant increase.
- 75 Waste management provides inconsistent value for money when costs and performance are analysed. Unit costs are only available for collection. In 2004/05 these were above average at £45.82 per household. Performance is mixed. Recycling has improved recently and is about on schedule to achieve the national targets for 2005/06 (unaudited data). Public satisfaction although below average for collection and in the worst quartile for recycling facilities according to the latest BVPIs has shown some recent improvement in surveys conducted by the Council. From 84 to 93 per cent and 62 to 80 per cent respectively. But minimisation as measured by the amount of waste per head is in the worst quartile nationally at 473 kilograms.
- 76 Street cleansing also delivers an inconsistent level of value for money. The latest cost of street cleansing per head is £6 (2004), and is below average for similar councils. Recent unaudited data indicated that the Council is delivering an overall 'B' grade for the street cleansing service. This is very recent and BVPI satisfaction levels are in the worst quartile but again unaudited data provided by the Councils indicates a rise to 58 per cent. The Council does not formally monitor performance in relation to responding to cleansing requests such as fly tipping. Indeed it has not set clear explicit targets and standards for the service so it is difficult for the Council to judge the level of performance and VFM it is providing in this service.
- 77 The Council has not recently considered alternative ways of delivering the services. There is a mixed economy operating. The main services of waste collection, green waste and street cleansing are provided in-house, but contractors provide some services. These include recycling collections and the servicing of mini recycling centres. The Council has not market tested the collection and cleansing services since the contract was awarded nearly six years ago. It is therefore unable to judge if it is delivering VFM.

- 78 The Council is developing a modern approach to procurement. It has a comprehensive framework of strategy and guidance which was adopted in September 2005. This includes a procurement strategy, e-procurement strategy and guidance for councillors and officers who may be involved in procurement. There is also clear and concise information on the web site to encourage suppliers and contractors to tender for contracts. This also includes strategies, guidance and contacts for more details. The strategies and guidance are relatively new and therefore their effectiveness has not been extensively tested and reviewed. However, there are clear examples of effective procurement outcomes. The Council uses a contractor to provide the weekly kerbside recycling collections. The extra collections, that is the difference between fortnightly and weekly collections, is just £50,000 per annum. This represents good VFM.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 79 The Council has an inconsistent track record of delivering improvement in the service. There is acknowledgement within the Council of the need for change. The progress assessment carried out in December 2005 noted that so far the driver for change has primarily been external, such as government targets and inspection, but this has started to change and improvement is now becoming internally generated. The planning service has a strong recent track record in this respect. This is not yet reflected in the audited BVPIs which show poor and static performance. But data supplied by the Council indicates significant improvement in development control and recycling.
- 80 The picture is mixed in waste management. The Council has been slow to respond to the national waste agenda. For example it did not achieve the first national recycling target in 2003/04. Recycling has improved significantly in recent months since the Council has prioritised its improvement. This is yet to be reflected in the audited BVPIs but the Council own unaudited data shows that the 2005/06 statutory target should be exceeded. The Council's own unaudited data also shows that satisfaction levels for several aspects of the service have recently improved. But there are still significant weak areas such as minimisation and enforcement.
- 81 Access to recycling facilities has improved. The Council has rolled out kerbside recycling to all individual households in the borough. This equates to 95 per cent. The remaining 5 per cent are blocks of flats and the Council is keen to provide doorstep recycling to these to enable people to have easy access to recycling facilities. It is installing mini recycling centres at all its flats to provide full coverage.
- 82 There is little improvement evident in other aspects of the service. Minimisation is not improving and remains in the worst quartile and recent unaudited data indicates even higher levels of waste (over 520 kilograms per head). There are no longer-term plans and targets to improve this aspect of waste management as noted earlier.
- 83 Audited satisfaction levels (as shown by BVPIs) for all aspects of waste management are not improving. Satisfaction with recycling facilities has fallen from 68 to 62 per cent and from the second to the worst quartile. Satisfaction with the waste collection service has fallen from 86 to 84 per cent and remains below average. Recent unaudited data supplied by the Council does show a recent improvement in these aspects - 80 per cent for recycling and 93 per cent for collection.

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- 84 The planning service has a mixed track record in respect of satisfaction data with the service. From 2000/01 to 2003/04 satisfaction with the service fell from 85 to 76 per cent and from the best quartile nationally to just above average. The Council's own survey data in 2002/03 indicated satisfaction had risen to 89 per cent but fallen again in 2004/05 to 78 per cent. Whilst generally above average the trend has fluctuated.
- 85 Improvement in the Council's cleansing service is unclear. This is because the Council has only recently introduced monitoring of cleansing standards, so it is difficult for the Council to judge improvement over time as a baseline has only just been established. However, public satisfaction with cleansing has fallen from 66 to 54 per cent which indicates a worsening level of performance. Again recent unaudited data supplied by the Council shows an improvement to 58 per cent.
- 86 The Council has gained efficiencies and improvements in value for money through procurement. This is supported by developing a modern approach to procurement which was outlined earlier. For example, it has saved £184,000 through the procurement of refuse vehicles in partnership with Coventry City Council.
- 87 There is little evidence of significant change as a result of learning from best performers in the country. The Council is a member of the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Association of Planning Officers which exchanges information and carries out some joint projects. Whilst national planning inspection reports are scrutinised the service has not sought out top performers nor does it regularly seek critical feedback from local people and service users to inform service delivery.
- 88 There is an example of the Council having to abandon a crucial decision and strategy which has impacted adversely on prospects for improvement. It discontinued fortnightly collections which had the potential to achieve efficiency savings, systematically reduce residual waste collected and improve recycling rates. Despite problems with the contract in relation to the disposal of green waste, the Council failed to adequately prepare the community for the scale of change to a fortnightly collection which would have helped reduce the public's resistance.
- 89 There is a clear turnaround in performance in planning and aspects of waste but a mixed performance on maintaining focus on these weaker services. Since planning and waste data was published for 2004/05 the Council's own unaudited data indicates a significant improvement in performance of aspects of these services with some improvement in planning performance being recognised in the Addison report in June 2005. However, planning and waste were highlighted as weak services in the Council's CPA report back in 2004 and despite these being given focus as priority areas the pace of achieving significant improvement has been slow with some aspects such as waste minimisation still deteriorating.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 90** The Council does not display clear leadership in the sphere of waste management. Improvement in the past has been initiated mainly by external stimuli such as statutory targets and inspection. There is no clear and cohesive longer-term vision for the waste management and cleansing service in the borough structured around the national and regional waste agenda and local needs. There are some objectives for the shorter-term, such as targets for recycling for the current year and to achieve grade 'B' for BVPI 199 cleansing standards. These are in the service development plan and the Council is also considering the recycling of plastics and cardboard following feedback from users. But formal longer-term ambitions and targets are absent in the Council's own plans and strategies. Without these it is not clear how the Council will achieve the regional and national agenda.
- 91** The Council's local planning policy and aims for community involvement in the planning process, show clear ambitions for the future. The draft Statement of Community Involvement is judged as sound by the Government Office and the Council is intending this to be used as the 'blueprint' for all community consultation and involvement. The Government Office feedback on the Local Plan 2005 is that it has a clear vision for the future.
- 92** The Council has demonstrated a clear commitment to working in partnership to achieve improvement in waste management. It is supporting the Warwickshire County Council waste management strategy which provides a clear shared vision for waste management in the county. It has formally adopted the strategy and is currently considering a memorandum of understanding. This strategy has clear and ambitious targets for waste recycling and diversion from landfill. These targets exceed the national targets and the strategy is for the next 15 years.
- 93** The Council is strengthening its strategic planning systems. There is a comprehensive strategic planning framework in place which supports the integration of key plans and strategies. Councillors are more involved in determining the strategic direction of the Council and a medium-term financial plan has recently been adopted. These processes are embryonic and as such not fully established and proven. The longer-term vision for the borough remains unclear and the Council has still to confirm lesser priority services.

94 Service planning is developing and improving. The service development plans for the two services provide a well-structured framework in which to articulate the aims and objectives of the service. The plans link to corporate objectives but there is significant a weakness with the current years plans. These include a lack of:

- clear, quantified and challenging public facing targets;
- analysis of business risks and actions to manage risk (some operational risks are included);
- clear linkages to demonstrate support of the objectives for waste in the high-level improvement plan; and
- implementation plans which are SMART and clear with milestones to gauge progress.

As a result, it is unclear what the service is planning to do, how progress will be monitored and what the Council is trying to achieve for the service. The Council recognises these weaknesses and is attempting to address them in its design of plans for 2006/07.

95 Performance management within the Council is not yet effective but is developing and improving. There is some way to go before a performance management culture is established. Performance is being monitored and reported monthly to the corporate management team and quarterly to councillors. This process is being reinforced by the recent introduction of an information technology based reporting systems. This is facilitating the sharing of performance data and therefore its ownership. Councillors are becoming more active in this process and some portfolio holders are well-informed about the services they oversee and are starting to challenge performance. This is not consistent and the Council recognises that councillor capacity and their scrutiny and challenge roles need to be further developed. A funded development programme, with specialist facilitators, has been put in place.

96 Project planning is developing. There have been examples of ineffective project management in the past, such as the introduction of changes to the collection and kerbside recycling service which had to be reversed. These were not thought through nor were they supported by effective planning. This weakness is recognised by the Council and systems are being introduced to improve project management – such as a new framework for small projects and the use of PRINCE2 methodology for recent projects such as the pilot one-stop-shop.

97 The Council has been slow to deploy new technology to improve services, gain efficiencies and achieve improved value for money. There are few effective and efficient data systems in waste which results in limited timely data related to response times for reported incidents such as littering, dog fouling missed collections and fly tipping. This is recognised and the Council is introducing new systems to improve performance in this respect.

- 98 The services are failing to fully implement action plans as identified in their individual Service Development Plans. The 2005/06 service development plan for Environmental Health and Planning indicates significant slippage with only seven of the 18 planned actions having been completed for 2004/05. The performance against the 2005/06 action plan has improved with 9 out of the 13 planned actions being completed or on course for completion. The 2005/06 Service Development Plan for Waste services contains a limited review of performance in the previous year for example there is no mention of minimisation, response performance and education and enforcement action.
- 99 The Council formally adopted the enforcement concordat in August 2000 and the Council's overall approach to enforcement is that that it is consistent with the Concordat. The Concordat requires that annual reports of performance against its enforcement policy standards are published which the Council is not currently doing. As a Standards Authority, the Council submits an annual report to consultants on behalf of the ODPM in relation to the level of formal planning enforcement activity for when statutory action is being taken for breach of legislation but does not publish formal performance data against its enforcement standards. Whilst it sees the final outcome and quality of the process as the main performance criteria, without such formal publishing the community cannot judge how well the Council is delivering against its policy.
- 100 The service responds well to comments and complaints and examples have been noted for both planning and waste. The planning reception desk is now sited on the ground floor and the Council is now considering the feasibility of recycling plastics and cardboard waste.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 101 The Council is in a sound financial position. This is the view of the Council's external auditors. The current financial basis is healthy and reserves are being managed in line with the Council's financial strategy.
- 102 Corporate capacity is becoming more focused on improvement. There is an emerging clarity of priorities and councillors are more involved in setting objectives. This is new and unproven and there is still a lack of longer-term vision and target and outcome setting is still underdeveloped.
- 103 Councillor capacity and development is a weakness, but one that is being actively addressed. Improvement in the service has primarily been officer lead, but it was clear from interviews that portfolio holders are committed to improving the service. But more generally, councillors have a limited clarity about their strategic role. This is recognised and there is a clear commitment to improve. There is a comprehensive training programme in place that is funded with £200,000 from the ODPM capacity building programme.

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- 104** There are clear examples of investment in waste service infrastructure to improve capacity and performance. This is in relation to waste collection/recycling and cleansing. In cleansing, there has been investment in plant and equipment to deliver the service more effectively. In waste collection a new fleet has been purchased which should lead to efficiencies in maintenance, provide better reliability and available through an arrangement which provides replacement vehicles for more serious breakdowns. The Council is also installing mini recycling centres at all blocks of flats and other sites where individual collections are not practical. This should lead to increased recycling as a result of readily available facilities at all households in the borough.
- 105** The effect on capacity due to staff sickness is mixed. The overall sickness level for the Council for 2004/05 at 12.2 days per member of staff was in the worst quartile nationally. In waste management services sickness levels are running at over 15 days per employee per year which is significantly above the Council average. As a result of a more proactive approach to sickness management, this has improved from a figure of over 20 days in the last three years but there is still a considerable reliance on agency staff who are less familiar with work routines and therefore less effective than permanent staff. In Environmental Health and Planning the sickness levels are much better and at 5.04 days per full-time employee at the end of December 2005 are better than the Council as a whole. This accordingly has a far less negative impact on the service.
- 106** In the recent past there have been vacancies in key posts in the service. This has had a negative impact on capacity and performance. For example a lack of staff in waste has prevented the Council from recording the inspection data necessary to calculate the performance indicator for standards of cleanliness. This has been resourced for less than 12 months and up to recently the Council has been unable to judge objectively how well it has been delivering the service. To balance this, the Council has increased staff capacity to support service improvement. A waste education officer has been appointed to deliver awareness raising initiatives to encourage recycling and minimisation.
- 107** The services use partnership working to strengthen capacity and gain efficiencies. There are examples in both services with some clear beneficial outcomes. The Warwickshire Waste Partnership articulates and supports a developing longer-term approach to tackling waste management in the borough although the shared objectives are not clearly reflected in any of the Council's current plans and strategies. The Council is working with North Warwickshire Borough Council in relation to Building Control. Despite the benefits from some partnerships, there is a limited strategic and systematic approach to managing partnerships. For example there is little evidence to indicate that partnerships are systematically evaluated against criteria such as alignment with objectives.

- 108** Consultants are used to provide additional resource capacity or expertise. In planning consultants are used by the service to cover for days lost by junior officers while at University and also used in the past to cover for long-term periods of sickness. Consultants have also been used as Planning witnesses for a Public Inquiry and to write written evidence for the Local Plan Inquiry. The Council is currently preparing a business case to examine the feasibility of a partnership with North Warwickshire BC for the provision of both councils Building Control services and the expertise and assistance of the West Midlands Centre for Procurement Excellence have been sought to help compile this and to ensure a quality output.
- 109** The Council also seeks out external funding to boost capacity. A proactive approach to systematically seeking out external funding is underdeveloped. However, there are clear examples in both services of beneficial outcomes, such as £750,000 from a Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) which the Council used to purchase collection bins and recycling boxes.
- 110** The Warwickshire Waste Partnership has the capacity and commitment from partners to potentially manage waste in the medium to longer-term. It provides a framework in which to develop and improve waste management in the borough, but as yet has had little explicit impact on the Council's own strategies. For examples the aspirational recycling targets of for 2009/10 are not articulated in any council plans. The WMW strategy does provide a clear indication of targets, objectives and infrastructure options, but the partners face some tough decisions and the memorandum of understanding has yet to be adopted.
- 111** The Council's approach to succession planning is mixed in the service. There is little evidence that there is a structured approach to this in waste management which results in a strong reliance on agency and temporary staff to fill gaps. The Council has been making good progress on maximising capacity in Development Control within the past year and developing a sustainable level of capacity. The Council strongly believes in a policy of 'growing its own staff' and a number of its senior officers in DC completed their training with the Council. It has consequently appointed a new trainee in the service to follow on in this process. Planning and Development Control and Building Control services have a relatively low staff turnover rate, which has a corresponding positive impact on capacity. Staff capacity has also been improved through concentrating specialists on technical issues. This has been achieved partly through a review of operations and the separation of administration duties in both Development and Building Control services and these now jointly provided. The improvements made to the ground floor planning reception have also meant that a number of day-to-day public enquiries and general advice are provided by non-technical staff.