

Local government - Service Inspection Report

July 2006



Environment Inspection

Fylde 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 (KLOE) 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 Fylde is a district council within Lancashire. The area covers 166 square kilometres. It includes the resorts of Lytham and St Annes-on-Sea, the market town of Kirkham and villages such as Freckleton, Singleton and Wrea Green. It has five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), ten conservation areas and 33 other sites of nature conservation interest. These sites include coastal sand dunes and the Ribble Estuary, which is also designated a special protection area for the conservation of wild birds.
- 2 The population is 75,800 living in 32,000 households; 3.6 per cent are from ethnic minority communities. Over 22.6 per cent are aged 65 and over compared with the national and regional average of 16.1 per cent. The resident population is increasing with a growth of 3.4 per cent since 2001.
- 3 Fylde is ranked 242 out of 354 in the indices of deprivation for local authority areas in England (with 1 being the most disadvantaged). Unemployment is well below the national and regional averages. The main industries include agriculture, business services, manufacturing and public services.
- 4 The Fylde Local Strategic Partnership (FLSP), comprising public, private, community and voluntary organisations, has produced a community plan that sets out a vision for the area by 2013:

'To create a community in which people feel safe, where services are accessible and where there are opportunities for all'.

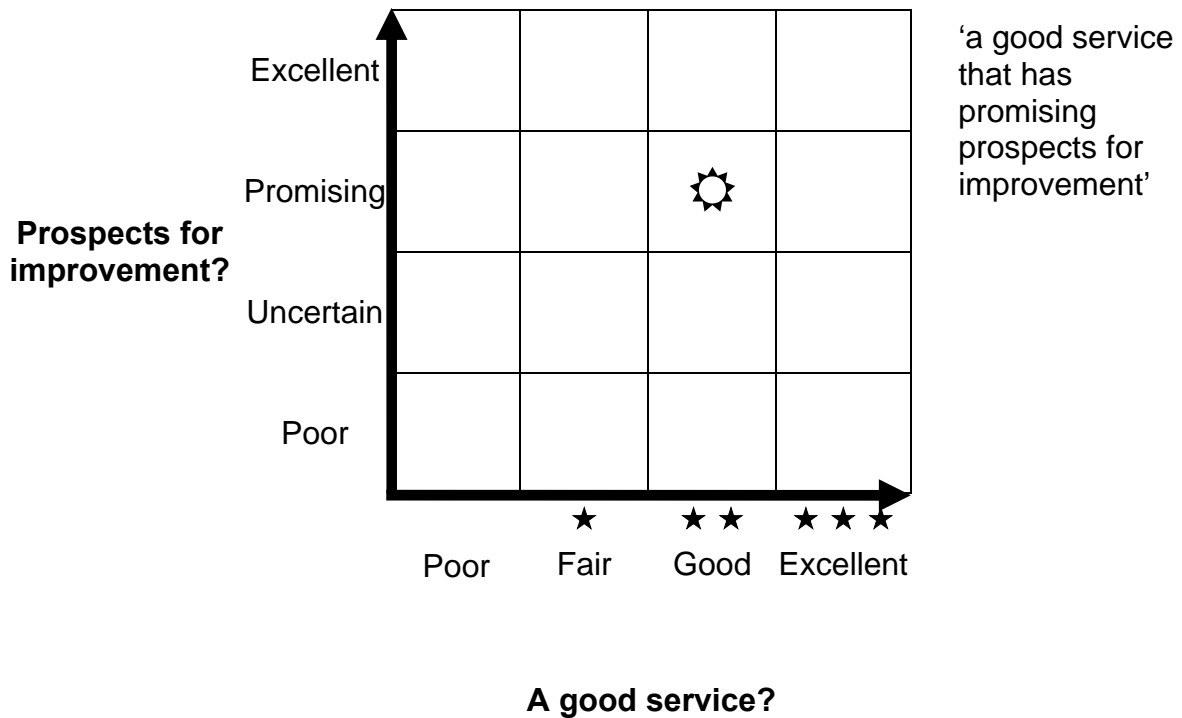
The community plan includes visions for priority themes and the key outcomes that the FLSP is seeking to achieve. One theme is *'a borough that protects and enhances the environment'*.

- 5 Fylde Borough Council is controlled by the Conservative party with 26 of the 51 seats. The Council's vision is *'to make a difference for the good of all local people and visitors, especially those in greatest need. All our actions are geared towards supporting the long-term vision outlined in the Fylde Community Plan 2003 – 2013'*. It has five corporate objectives, including *'conserve, protect and enhance the quality of the Fylde natural and built environment'*.
- 6 The Council's net revenue budget in 2005/06 was £8.7 million compared with £8.5 million in 2004/05. Services are delivered by eight business units, including Consumer Wellbeing, and Protection, Strategic Planning and Development and Streetscene. These units are collectively responsible for environmental health, waste management, grounds maintenance, building control and planning services. The net cost of these services is £6 million.
- 7 We inspected how the Council is achieving its corporate objective *'to conserve, protect and enhance the quality of the Fylde natural and built environment'*. In particular we assessed how this is being achieved through the Council's management of the natural and built environment, open green spaces and local environmental quality.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Fylde Borough Council as providing a **good, two-star** Environment Service that has **promising 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

- 9 The Service is a **good, two-star** service because it has some strengths, including:
- high levels of user satisfaction;
 - a good understanding of users' needs through a range of consultation mechanisms;
 - responsiveness to local concerns and service requests;
 - public and open, green spaces are maintained to a good standard;
 - good access to recycling facilities, resulting in a high level of performance with a reduction in the amount of waste produced in the borough;

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.

- provision of service standards and environmental information; and
 - good approach to securing improvements in the built environment and enhancing the environmental character of the borough.
- 10 However, some matter require attention, including:
- a high number of telephone calls from users to Fylde Direct are abandoned;
 - the Service is not making the best use of all enforcement and discretionary powers, particularly in development control and forward planning functions;
 - conservation areas do not have an up to date character appraisal or published management proposals;
 - a low percentage of sites of potential concern as contaminated land have sufficient information to decide whether remediation is necessary; and
 - minimising the environmental impacts of the Council's own activities is not part of systematic delivery.
- 11 The Service has **promising prospects** for improvement. It has some strengths including:
- a track record of improvement that has delivered benefits for users;
 - councillors and staff are committed to service improvements;
 - a challenging agenda to further improve the built and natural environment;
 - an improved service planning framework and integration with financial planning;
 - financial investment in the Service, including external funding;
 - good partnership working to deliver its priorities;
 - service weaknesses are being addressed though action plans and strategies;
 - good approach to procurement and securing efficiency gains; and
 - capacity issues are being addressed.
- 12 However, some matters need attention, including:
- performance management systems are not embedded across all service areas, with key outcome measures lacking for key initiatives;
 - consultation mechanisms are not fully co-ordinated to make best use of resources;
 - sickness absence policies have not had a significant impact on improving attendance at work; and
 - benchmarking is not being used across all service areas to drive improvement.

Recommendations

- 13 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 Review, consolidate and update the Council's environmental policies and:

- *set targets for the reduction, re-use and recycling of the Council's own waste production;*
- *set environmental standards for the procurement of goods and services; and*
- *explore the opportunities for an accredited environmental management system.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- enhancing community leadership and the Council's contribution to the achievement of the Fylde Local Strategic Partnership's priority themes;
- reducing the Council's impact upon the environment through the production of waste and the quantity of goods purchased; and
- consistency and improved decision-making.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2007.

Recommendation

R2 Review and strengthen the Service's approach to the regulation of the built and natural environment to achieve greater impact through the effective use of enforcement and other powers and the contribution of partners.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved compliance with planning consents and less unauthorised developments;
- reduced incidences of littering offences and improved co-ordination with education and preventative measures; and

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.

- maximising and ensuring the contribution of all services to environmental objectives.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2007.

<i>Recommendation</i>
<i>R3 Review corporate and service approaches to consultation in line with the Statement of Community Involvement and the progress of the Local Development Scheme.</i>

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- less duplication of effort and more efficient use of resources;
- a best practice approach; and
- clearer and more consistent community engagement.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by December 2006.

Report

Context

The locality

- 14 Fylde is a district council within Lancashire. The area covers 166 square kilometres. It includes the resorts of Lytham and St Annes-on-Sea, the market town of Kirkham and villages such as Freckleton, Singleton and Wrea Green. It has five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), ten conservation areas and 33 other sites of nature conservation interest. These sites include coastal sand dunes and the Ribble Estuary, which is also designated a special protection area for the conservation of wild birds.
- 15 The population is 75,800 living in 32,000 households; 3.6 per cent are from ethnic minority communities. Over 22.6 per cent are aged 65 and over compared with the national and regional average of 16.1 per cent. The resident population is increasing with a growth of 3.4 per cent since 2001.
- 16 Fylde is ranked 242 out of 354 in the indices of deprivation for local authority areas in England (with 1 being the most disadvantaged). Unemployment is well below the national and regional averages. The main industries include agriculture, business services, manufacturing and public services.
- 17 The Fylde Local Strategic Partnership (FLSP), comprising public, private, community and voluntary organisations, has produced a community plan that sets out a vision for the area by 2013:

'To create a community in which people feel safe, where services are accessible and where there are opportunities for all'.

The community plan includes visions for priority themes and the key outcomes that the FLSP is seeking to achieve. One theme is *'a borough that protects and enhances the environment'*.

The Council

- 18 Fylde Borough Council is controlled by the Conservative party with 26 of the 51 seats. The Council is governed by a Cabinet, which is made up of a Leader and eight portfolio holders, including members with responsibilities for Community and Social Well-being, Development and Regeneration and Streetscene. Four Scrutiny Committees - Community Outlook, Performance Improvement, Policy and Service Review and Planning Policy - complement the governance arrangements.
- 19 The Council's vision is *'to make a difference for the good of all local people and visitors, especially those in greatest need. All our actions are geared towards supporting the long-term vision outlined in the Fylde Community Plan 2003–2013'*. It has five corporate objectives, including *'conserve, protect and enhance the quality of the Fylde natural and built environment'*.

- 20 The Council's net revenue budget in 2005/06 was £8.7 million compared with £8.5 million in 2004/005.
- 21 Services are delivered by eight business units, including Consumer Wellbeing, and Protection, Strategic Planning and Development and Streetscene. These units are collectively responsible for environmental health, waste management, grounds maintenance, planning and building control services. The net cost of these services is £6 million.
- 22 In March 2004 the Audit Commission published a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) about Fylde Borough Council that categorised it as weak. The Council subsequently identified its priority areas for improvement. An Improvement Board, including representatives from the Audit Commission, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and a peer Chief Executive, was established to monitor and review progress.

The Council's environment service

- 23 We inspected how the Council is achieving its corporate objective '*to conserve, protect and enhance the quality of the Fylde natural and built environment*'. In particular we assessed how this is being achieved through the Council's management of local environmental quality, the natural and built environment and open green spaces and by its building and development control, local planning and waste management services. References in this report to 'the Service' reflect how the Council is achieving this objective collectively through these services.
- 24 The Audit Commission has previously inspected the Council's Street and Amenity Cleansing (2001), Parks and Open Spaces (2001) and Development Control and Building Control (2002) services. Street and Amenity Cleansing was judged to be a good service that will probably improve. Parks and Open Spaces and Development Control and Building Control were judged to be fair with uncertain prospects for improvement. The Public Space diagnostic in the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment concluded that there was a low need for improvement, based upon the risk of service failure and poor outcomes, for 'keeping the locality clean' but a high need for 'how well does the Council contribute to the management of the physical environment'.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 25 The Council has a corporate objective to '*conserve, protect and enhance the quality of the Fylde natural and built environment*'. The Council's Corporate Plan 2003-2007 and Corporate Performance Statement Plan set out this objective and the Council's priority actions.
- 26 The Corporate Plan 2003-2007 originally included the following four-year goals:
- provide a clean, tidy and attractive environment throughout the borough;
 - balance the need for development with protecting the environment; and
 - maintain, protect and promote the natural resources of the borough.
- 27 The Corporate Plan was revised in 2005 but these goals were not specifically stated. The plan is updated each year and details high and secondary priority actions, year-end targets and measures of success (2007 outcome). Most, but not all, of the actions have identifiable and measurable outcomes, such as residents satisfaction with planning, recycling, street cleanliness and waste collection. Each business unit sets out service objectives, annual key specific objectives, targets for local and national performance indicators and the contribution to the corporate objective. For example, Streetscene and Consumer Wellbeing and Protection have the vision '*to work together to provide a safe, healthy and clean environment for residents and visitors to Fylde borough*'.
- 28 The corporate objective supports local, national and regional priorities. It reflects the community plan theme. '*Transforming our local environment*', by improving the quality, cleanliness and safety of public space, is a shared priority between central and local government. The objective is consistent with national and regional planning policies, such as the Lancashire Structure Plan and other local initiatives, for example, the Lancashire Biodiversity Plan. The recycling and composting targets reflect the Lancashire Municipal Waste Management Strategy (LMWMS), which has been produced in partnership with all Lancashire councils, and exceeds national targets.
- 29 The objective is consistent with, and informed by, users' views on priorities for improvements. The Council has commissioned surveys that found that these include environmental protection and cleanliness, preserving the quality of parks and open spaces and regenerating the built environment. It complements the Council's statutory duties relating to air quality, building and development control, environmental cleanliness, waste collection and the regulation of abandoned vehicles, dog fouling and littering offences.

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

- 30 We assessed how the service is meeting the needs of local community and users against three key lines of enquiry:
- access, customer care and user and/or community focus;
 - diversity; and
 - service outcomes for users and the community.

Access, customer care and user and/or community focus

- 31 Overall the needs of citizens and users are at the heart of the design and delivery of the service now and in the future, based on consultation and surveys that inform priorities. The Council's core values include *'provide equal access to services whether you live in town, village or countryside'*.
- 32 The service is accessible and generally responsive although users' telephone calls are often abandoned or not answered within the specified target times. It has a good understanding of users' needs through extensive consultation for the community and corporate plans, the Fylde Citizens Panel, a Listening Day and surveys. Personal contact is available through Fylde Direct contact centres in Kirkham and St Annes-on-Sea. Users can also access information and services via the Council's website and by e-mail, Freepost and telephone. The Council has installed six internet kiosks at various locations around the borough. The kiosks provide free access to e-mail and on-line services. Front-line staff carry contact cards.
- 33 Fylde Direct is a single point of contact for all council services. Customer services specialists have a wide range of knowledge about the type of enquiries received and access to the necessary information to help service users. The Council aims to answer all calls within 30 seconds but only 50 per cent of calls are answered within this target. The average number of calls answered between November 2005 and April 2006 ranged from 65 per cent to 78 per cent. This means that up to 35 per cent of calls are abandoned. However, in such cases the phone system captures the number of the user who is rung back. The Council responds to every e-mail within one working day and to letters within five days. If a full response is not provided users are informed of who is dealing with an enquiry and when a full response will be provided. Technical support is provided for more complex issues, such as building control and planning enquiries.
- 34 The Council's website contains a good range of advice and information about the environment, including air quality, coastal protection, conservation, environmental maintenance, planning applications and policies, recycling and refuse collection. On-line forms can be downloaded to, for example, complete and submit a planning application, report abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping, request an assisted refuse collection or book and pay for a bulk collection. Applicants can check the progress on planning applications and view consultation responses, but this facility has not always been regularly updated.

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Links are provided to external sites such as the Planning Portal, Radiation Monitoring in Lancashire (RADMIL) and a 'not for profit' organisation that collects unwanted furniture for reuse.

- 35 The Service also provides other information that is not available on the website. This includes an A-Z recycling guide, produced with a local community organisation. It contains advice about waste minimisation and an extensive and comprehensive list of facilities to recycle a range of materials from artificial limbs to Yellow Pages and promotes local charity shops as outlets for second hand goods.
- 36 The Service carries out a range of activities that provides good access to services. It adopts a positive approach to development and recognises the need to balance economic, social and environmental issues and achieve sustainable development, for example, the regeneration of St Annes-on-Sea town centre. The Service has made progress in preparing a local development framework (LDF) in line with the Government's timescale. It has produced a Local Development Scheme and has adopted a draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 37 The Service publishes a range of planning information, such as conversion of traditional farm buildings, new flat developments, shop front design guides for the Lytham conservation area and village appraisals and plans. However, a number of these are dated and some documents have been in draft form for a number of years. The lack of such guidance limits the potential impact of planning on improving the quality of the built environment, the quality of submitted applications and hence the time spent in negotiations to improve the quality of design. The Service produces supplementary planning guidance (SPG) for significant developments.
- 38 It offers pre-application advice and, for some major applications, uses a development team approach. A design panel advises applicants on the aesthetics of certain prominent proposals. The public are allowed to speak at Development Control Committee meetings. Public exhibitions are held for major applications. The Service facilitates agents forums. In 2005/06 the Service scored 78 per cent for the quality of planning services checklist that includes access to advice and guidance.
- 39 All of the population is served by a kerbside collection of recyclables with 97 per cent having a collection of cans, cardboard, glass, garden waste, plastics and textiles. The Service publishes clear information and guidance. Free home composters are provided.
- 40 The kerbside collections are complemented by a network of bring sites and on- street facilities to cater for visitors to parks and tourist areas. Some bring sites are basic with a limited range of materials but others accept a wider range of recyclables. They are generally kept clean and tidy but some were found to have rubbish and recyclables around the actual containers and a small amount of graffiti. Furthermore, few sites have signage and recycling information in contrast to the on-street facilities. Users can also access recycling facilities at the two household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) in the borough that are operated by Lancashire County Council.

Here additional materials, such as rubble and hazardous materials, for example oil and batteries, can be sent for recycling or safe disposal.

- 41 Litter bins and dog bins are located at strategic points throughout the borough. Signs promote actions to reduce dog fouling, with designated control areas that are enforced on a risk assessment basis. The Service encourages responsible dog ownership through Top Dog school awards and microchipping events.
- 42 Responsiveness to service requests is variable. The Service responds to 98 per cent of environmental health requests (for example dog fouling or air quality complaints) within three days. However, in 2005/06 it responded to an average of only 50 per cent of fly-tipping complaints within one working day, below the target of 95 per cent, although this was actually achieved for two months. Only 42 per cent of abandoned vehicles were investigated within 24 hours but 91 per cent were then removed within 24 hours from the point at which the Council was legally entitled to remove the vehicle. Building control officers respond promptly to service requests as developments proceed and provide builders with mobile telephone numbers. The service follows up inspections of businesses with written advice.
- 43 Unaudited data shows that in 2005/06 the service achieved the national targets for minor and other planning applications but not for major applications, although this was actually met for six months before staffing difficulties reduced the capacity of the planning service. All standard searches are carried out in ten working days. All Tree Preservation Orders were decided within the eight week target. Over 91 per cent of conservation area notifications were decided within the three week target.
- 44 Service standards are generally clear and comprehensive for most activities. The Service has charters for development control, the dog warden service, planning enforcement and waste services and a draft charter for Consumer Wellbeing and Protection that includes environmental health services. The charters variously set out a commitment to customers, service promises and objectives and how services will be delivered. They include response times for some service requests and rectifying mistakes, such as missed bins. The bulk waste policies and trade waste charges are clear. However, standards are not complete. For example, the actual grades of street cleanliness are not specified and some response targets, such as dealing with abandoned vehicles, are not published. Furthermore, the Service has not involved users in setting standards and response times.
- 45 Service standards complement the Council's corporate approach set out in 'Customer Service at Fylde', which also includes details of the Council's complaints process if users are dissatisfied with the quality of a service. Reference to this procedure is included in the draft charter for Consumer Wellbeing and Protection but not in other charters.
- 46 The arrangements for communicating, consulting and engaging with users are good. The Council leads on a Listening Day, organised with FLSP partners, to obtain people's views on services and inform priorities. The Service consulted widely with local stakeholders to develop a vision for St Annes-on-Sea and was influenced by a range of public and business views.

It responds to feedback; for example, bowling green maintenance schedules and the provision of wheeled bins are in accordance with users' preferences and advice about asbestos is published. Fylde Direct has amended its service provision in response to feedback. The website carries on-line polls and invites comments.

Diversity

- 47 The service is taking action to ensure that most users or potential users have fair and equal access. It does not discriminate directly or intentionally against any person or other organisation and ensures that services do not impact adversely on different sections of the community.
- 48 Fylde Direct contact centres and public areas in other service buildings are accessible to, and suitable for, people with disabilities. Facilities include private interview rooms fitted with induction loops. The service has arrangements to provide information in alternative formats, including large print, Braille and a range of community languages. This is now promoted on all new leaflets but is not stated on all charters and information. 'Language Line' is available. The website has a 'Brousealoud' facility that will read out pages and attachments - this has been provided in response to the high number of elderly service users who are partially sighted.
- 49 The service has expanded kerbside collections to ensure that the majority of the population can recycle a range of materials. Properties, such as flats, have alternative collections for recycling using bulk waste containers. Residents, who are not on the wheeled bins system, have separate garden waste collections. New wheeled bin lids have Braille and notches so that partially sighted residents can differentiate and dispose of residual or recyclable waste correctly. The Service supports a local organisation for people with learning difficulties through the provision of recycling credits. Four per cent of waste collections are 'assisted' for residents who are disabled, elderly, infirm or who have special needs. A reasonable charge is made for bulk waste collections. Services for keeping the area clean are available to everyone and, in particular, community clean-ups and support are focused on less advantaged areas.
- 50 The Service takes a balanced approach to issues that affect different communities. The Local Plan contains policies that reflect the diversity of the community. The LDF and SCI have been developed in consultation with the FLSP which has adopted an impact assessment tool. In some areas, however, the service is not taking a proactive approach. For example, whilst the service has published information on the Council's web-site about the Disability Discrimination Act and relevant building regulations, it has not produced any design guidance to specifically help applicants. Development Control Committee meetings are not always held at times and locations to encourage all sections of the community to attend. The service does not review progress against policies on a regular basis.

- 51 The Council has assessed its approach to diversity in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, capacity, culture, encouraging local communities (including marginalised groups), leadership, managing performance, outcomes, priorities, rationale, vision and working with others. Staff have attended diversity awareness training but it is difficult to identify where this has resulted in changes to policy or practice, although officers are more aware of diversity issues.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 52 The service is delivering what it has promised and is effective in meeting local, regional and national objectives. User satisfaction is good across a range of services.
- 53 We assessed service outcomes for users and the community in relation to the three goals that were stated in the original Corporate Plan 2003-2007 and support the corporate objective '*conserve, protect and enhance the quality of the Fylde natural and built environment*'.

Provide a clean, tidy and attractive environment throughout the borough

- 54 The service is effective in providing a clean, tidy and attractive environment throughout the borough. Parks and green, open spaces, including flower and shrub beds, are maintained to a good standard. This has been recognised by Green Flag awards for some of the borough's parks, an Encams seaside award for St Annes-on-Sea beach, over 50 Britain and Bloom awards (that reflect conservation, local environmental quality and recycling) for towns and villages across the borough and a Royal Horticultural Society environmental quality award.
- 55 In 2004/05, 9 per cent of relevant land was found to have combined deposits of litter and detritus that fell below an unacceptable level. This was amongst the best 25 per cent of councils. The standard was maintained in 2005/06 with unaudited data showing a further improvement to 8 per cent. The percentage of relevant land and highways from which an unacceptable level of graffiti was visible was 2 per cent, with no incidence of fly-posting. No land classes were worse than the minimum standard of 25 per cent.
- 56 The Service has a balanced, reactive and proactive approach to removing litter. Street cleansing is provided each day of the year, having regard to input and output standards, and follows refuse collection and recycling rounds. Education visits are made to schools to raise awareness about littering. The Service undertakes specific projects to improve the local environment, such as community clean-ups in Freckleton and the central ward area of St Annes-on-Sea. Amenity beaches are cleansed regularly during summer.
- 57 The level of enforcement is variable. The service has a robust approach to the enforcement of air quality and dog fouling legislation, tackling litter problems on privately owned land and noise nuisance. It has an effective and pragmatic approach to householders who do not present their domestic waste for collection in the correct receptacles.

Enforcement of fly-tipping offences has not been proactive. The Service is now working with the Environment Agency and the Lancashire Business Forum by targeting known hotspots, supported by advice, education and warning notices. In 2005/06 the Service responded to 845 fly-tipping service requests. This was less than in 2004/05 (947) but higher than 2003/04 (772). Dog fouling service requests have remained stable. Enforcement policies comply with the Enforcement Concordat that sets out the principles of good enforcement.

- 58 The Service has been effective in reducing the amount of household waste collected and increasing the amount recycled, resulting in less waste disposal by landfill. It has made excellent progress to exceed its statutory recycling targets of 14 per cent by 2003/04 and 21 per cent by 2005/06. In 2003/04, 29.5 per cent of household waste was recycled or composted. Unaudited data for 2005/06 indicates that the amount is now 36.1 per cent with up to 44 per cent for individual months. This increase is due to the expansion of multi-material kerbside collections, supported by active promotion of these facilities by door-stepping campaigns and enforcement action to ensure waste is presented correctly for collection. The improvement in performance has been recognised by a national recycling award for the best local authority initiative. The refuse collection is reliable. Performance on refuse collection is now good with a record low number of missed bins.
- 59 The amount of waste collected per head of population fell by 3.7 per cent in 2005/06 from 442.5 kg to 426 kg compared to increases between 2002 and 2005. In 2004/05 the amount collected per head of population was above average. However, when considered with reductions in waste flows at the two HWRCs in the borough the impact has been significant. Over 5,230 tonnes less household waste was presented for recycling or disposal at the HWRCs in 2004/05 compared with 2001/02 - a reduction of 38.7 per cent. During the same period the amount of waste collected by the Service increased by 1,376 tonnes. Discounting any cross border waste flows the amount of household waste produced in the borough has fallen by 3,853 tonnes or 8.4 per cent. The Service promotes waste minimisation through, for example, the provision of free home composters to households and schools and reuse activities, which in 2005/06 diverted 0.4 per cent of household waste from landfill.
- 60 Air quality has been properly assessed. The conclusion was that the national objectives will be met by 2010. The Service monitors new developments that have a potential adverse effect on the environment and takes enforcement action for pollution offences, for example, an unauthorised emission of black smoke. In 2005/06 all pollution improvements to existing installations were carried out on time. It works with other councils to monitor the impact of radiation arising from the activities of the nuclear industry.

Balance the need for development with protecting the environment

- 61 The Service takes a proactive approach to conserving the countryside, the natural beauty of the area and enhancing the built environment. This is being delivered as promised through the designation of conservation areas, development control and planning policies.

- 62** The Council's Local Plan contains a wide range of policies aimed at protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment. Policies cover specific areas, such as air quality, sites of special scientific areas and waste production. They include the protection and conservation of species and wildlife and the use of Tree Preservation Orders. The policies reflect the need to achieve sustainable development in terms of biodiversity and habitat protection, location and transport and re-use of brownfield land, in addition to the quality of design. In 2004/05 and 2005/05, 61 per cent and 59 per cent respectively of new homes were built on previously developed land, compared with the public service agreement target of 60 per cent.
- 63** The Service has a good approach to securing improvements in the built environment and enhancing the environmental character of the borough through, for example, design briefs, market town initiatives and village appraisals. The Council received a British Urban Regeneration Award (BURA) and an English Partnerships award for best practice in the regeneration of St Annes-on-Sea town centre. This was a design-led approach based on refurbishing buildings and public spaces, which includes artwork, landscaping, lighting and new parking areas. Freckleton, Lytham and Kirkham have been enhanced with new paving, raised beds and areas of soft landscaping, which has been co-ordinated and integrated using modern materials in traditional styles. The Service has, however, not continued a design award scheme that encouraged good quality development throughout the borough.
- 64** Attention is given to preserving or enhancing the borough's ten conservation areas. Developments are only permitted in these areas when the character or appearance of the area, and its setting, are appropriately conserved or enhanced. Enhancements in the Lytham conservation area are consistent with the character of the environment and include new street lighting, a piazza and verandas. Building control has an emphasis on conservation. Relaxation powers are used where the integrity of a listed building would otherwise be at risk. Otherwise, however, conservation has had a low profile in terms of progressing policy, review and grant funding repairs to listed buildings. None of the conservation areas have an up to date character appraisal or published management proposals. Clear and concise appraisals of the character of conservation areas provide a sound basis for their designation and management.
- 65** The Service takes environmental issues into account when determining planning applications. It can show examples of development that are sustainable in terms of biodiversity, design, land use and location but this approach is not applied consistently. The Service has not taken full advantage of its discretionary planning powers to improve the natural and built environment, such as to clear land.
- 66** The Service takes enforcement action for breaches of planning consents but this is reactive and does not follow a clear set of criteria informing the initiation of action. As a result some issues, for example, control of advertisements and light pollution have not been addressed - partly this has been due to a lack of capacity. It has not instituted measures such as checking building regulation plans against those approved for planning or using building control officers to check conditions.

- 67 The Service has identified 1,525 sites of potential concern as contaminated land but only 7 per cent of sites have sufficient detailed information to decide whether remediation is necessary. The Service requires developers to deal with potential contamination issues before planning permission is granted and pay for the cost of cleaning up a site. It has published a strategy that outlines how it is proposed to identify and ensure the remediation of contaminated land but progress has been limited.

Maintain, protect and promote the natural resources of the borough

- 68 The Service is undertaking a range of effective activities to maintain, protect and promote the natural resources of the borough. Through these initiatives it is making a positive contribution towards creating, developing, maintaining and managing a sustainable, quality environment.
- 69 The Service has produced site management plans for its green flag and other sites, including the sand dunes (in partnership with Blackpool Borough Council) in the borough. These plans include maintenance standards and set out how the Service addresses arboriculture, conservation of landscape and natural features, sustainability and woodland management. Procedures and systems are in place to improve the environment and enhance and protect local wildlife and habitats. The Service has evaluated flood risk and sea defences in the borough. It monitors sand dunes for erosion to protect their appearance and environmental quality and carries out reprofiling, stabilising and planting of dunes when necessary. Beach cleansing operations have been revised to encourage the formation of embryo sand dunes.
- 70 The Service works with partners and relevant bodies to help care for and manage natural habitats and features, such as the Ribble Estuary and a SSSI that is managed in accordance with English Nature's guidance. It recognises the importance of biodiversity and the Council has adopted planning policies to further biodiversity objectives. However, it does not have a consistent approach to ensuring that these are enforced and implemented where necessary.
- 71 It is a signatory to the Lancashire Biodiversity Action Plan with a commitment to achieve, in partnership, its biodiversity objectives. This has been incorporated into the community plan. The FLSP's Environmental Enhancement sub-group's intended outcomes include managing landscapes and promoting the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The Service is planting 0.2 hectares of new woodland in 2006 and encouraging a front gardens planting scheme.
- 72 The service is achieving environmental benefits through other activities. It does not use peat and minimises the use of herbicides and pesticides. Green waste is composted on site. It uses eco-friendly vehicles with low emission equipment. Refuse collection routes are designed to maximise collection efficiency and hence reduce emissions to air. Recycling facilities are available in the Council's offices for paper, cans, cardboard, confidential waste, printer toners and broken wheeled bins. Storage tanks have been constructed on council-owned sites to prevent discharges of untreated sewage into the River Ribble.

The Council was the lead authority for the Millenergy Project to promote energy conservation - this was recognised by a national award.

- 73 The Council does not have an accredited environmental management system nor a current strategy to embed sustainability in all its activities, such as encouraging the use of sustainable materials in development. The overall impacts of its activities are not known. Although some activities have been absorbed within the work of the FLSP, the Council's Environment Strategy has not been updated. However, it has recently been approached by the local Member of Parliament to participate in an initiative aimed at making Fylde an exemplar borough for energy and fuel conservation/efficiency.

User satisfaction

- 74 User experience and satisfaction with the Service are good. The Listening Day survey (August 2005) found that 90 per cent of residents were satisfied with Fylde as a place to live. They have high satisfaction with refuse collection (84 per cent), environmental health (87 per cent), parks and open spaces (81 per cent) and street cleansing (75 per cent). Residents were less satisfied with planning (54 per cent) but in 2005 95 per cent of applicants rated this service satisfactory or better. Satisfaction amongst visitors with the area, cleanliness of the streets and parks is over 97 per cent.
- 75 All users of Fylde Direct are satisfied with the courtesy and helpfulness of officers, how their enquiry is dealt with, opening hours, overall service and the quality of information provided, but have concerns about the length of time waited for calls to be answered.
- 76 In 2003/04 the Council was amongst the best 25 per cent of councils for satisfaction with recycling facilities (77 per cent) and for residents who thought that litter and rubbish lying around (34 per cent) and abandoned or burnt out vehicles (10 per cent) were problems. Satisfaction with cleanliness (62 per cent) and by planning applicants (79 per cent) were above average but refuse collection (81 per cent) was then below average.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 77 We considered how:
- the service's costs compare to others, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices; and
 - value for money is managed, including through partnership and procurement and taking a long-term view.

How do the service's costs compare?

- 78 The service's costs compare favourably with other district councils and nearest neighbours, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices. It is delivering some good quality services with high user satisfaction.

79 Compared with the Council's nearest neighbours costs per head of population are:

- amongst the lowest 25 per cent for environmental health services and other environmental services;
- below the median for planning, environment and total environment, planning and transport services; and
- amongst the highest 25 per cent for waste collection and parks and open spaces.

The comparison with all district councils is similar, except for environmental health, environment and parks and open spaces which are above the medians. The estimated costs of the Council's cultural, environmental and planning services and all service expenditure per head of population (2005/06) are the third lowest of all 12 Lancashire district councils.

80 The costs of services are affected by external local factors, for example, wind-blown sand in the coastal areas adds to the costs of street cleansing and to the amount of waste collected per head of population. Other factors include access to services in rural areas and the impact of tourism. Despite such influences overall costs are favourable.

81 Costs compare favourably with other councils providing similar levels and standards of services allowing for the local context. Low cost areas such as environment health generate high levels of satisfaction. The cost of planning generally reflects performance in terms of processing applications and appeals. Where costs are high, for example, parks and open spaces and waste management, the Service has good outcomes with high user satisfaction. However, although recycling/composting performance is high, other councils have achieved higher performance at a lower cost.

82 Overall comparative performance has been mixed. In 2004/05 cleanliness of relevant land, kerbside recycling facilities, other planning applications and recycling/composting were amongst the best 25 per cent of councils. Minor planning applications were better than average. The environmental health and planning checklists, major planning applications and new homes built on previously developed land were below average. The cost of waste collection was amongst the highest 25 per cent. The amount of waste produced in the borough has reduced but the actual amount collected by the Service from households was amongst the worst 25 per cent.

83 Costs and resource allocations reflect policy decisions and the Council's objectives. The Council has made clear what are, and what are not, its priorities for improvement. Higher spending areas such as waste management and parks and open spaces, are priorities. It has invested in refuse collection and recycling/composting initiatives to increase performance and Fylde Direct to improve customer service. Resources have been specifically targeted to improve the quality of the environment in a council ward which is amongst the most 20 per cent disadvantaged in the country.

Capital spending decisions are taken with full information on their contribution to the achievement of the Council's objectives, financial forecasts of their longer term impact and the revenue consequences.

- 84 The Council has clear and accurate information on the costs of individual services. Corporate processes are in place to support budget control and monitoring. Comparative data on other councils and how this relates to the quality of services is lacking. As such any differences are not understood and used to demonstrate value for money, improve specific outcomes, review cost-effectiveness and strategically manage resources, However, the Council is addressing high spending areas.

How is value for money managed?

- 85 The service has a good approach to managing value for money, including through partnership, procurement and taking a long-term view.
- 86 The service applies modern procurement methods and partnerships that are resulting in demonstrable value for money and delivering outcomes that meet the needs of users and the community. It uses effective procurement practices and takes decisions on an objective basis within a transparent framework that follows good practice. The contract for Streetscene services for Fylde and Wyre Borough Councils was awarded to the Service through a competitive tendering process at a cost of £2.4 million lower than a private sector bid. The cost of this service for Fylde residents was £1.2 million cheaper, equivalent to a council tax saving of £36.76 per property per annum.
- 87 The service has not yet exposed its ground maintenance functions to competition but did win contracts to provide services for Fylde Housing and a local school in open competition. It invites tenders for parks projects, such as drainage contracts. Value for money is also achieved by engaging some parish councils to provide street cleansing at a lower cost than direct provision.
- 88 A restructuring of Streetscene services is intended to reduce costs and improve efficiencies. The service recognises the benefits of other partnership working to reduce costs and improve outcomes, for example, a 'sweat equity' programme to encourage volunteers for Friends of Parks groups. It is working with other councils on land use studies, supplementary planning guidance and sustainability appraisals. A shared resource with Wyre Borough Council enables each authority to pool knowledge and buying power.
- 89 Such value for money considerations focus on the benefits and costs to customers. Users now have access to a wider range of recycling facilities, with fewer missed collections and improved street cleansing, resulting in high satisfaction. The Council has achieved the best recycling/composting rate in the Northwest and national awards for procurement and recycling.
- 90 Management arrangements include a focus on value for money but mechanisms to drive and monitor progress and review impacts are still being developed across the service. The scope for improving cost-effectiveness is kept under review. Best value reviews have achieved some significant improvements in value through lower costs and improved performance.

Priority is given to high cost and/or poor performing services in setting the Scrutiny Committees' work programmes. Task and finish groups consider options appraisals and are required to specify how an option will deliver continuous improvement in terms of service and costs. A review of partnerships has increased the focus on outcomes and value for money to support the Council's corporate objectives.

- 91 The Council had a target within the Lancashire Public Service Agreement under which it was committed to improving performance against a range of national indicators, including determination of planning applications, e-government, missed refuse collections, recycling and sickness absence by 2005/06.
- 92 The Council uses the budget process to allocate resources to meet service needs. However, cost information is not always linked to changes in performance, achievement of corporate objectives or impact on users and the community. Performance management systems continue to be developed, but do not link activity and cost to establish whether value for money is being achieved. Information on costs and the quality of services are regularly reported to councillors but are not presented in such a way that costs can be taken into account when reviewing performance. Relative costs and performance, and how they compare to others, currently and over time, are not regularly reviewed.

Summary

- 93 Overall the needs of citizens and users are at the heart of design and delivery of the service now and in the future. The service has a good understanding of local needs and is generally accessible and responsive. Service standards are generally clear and comprehensive but are not always explained in measurable terms that users can understand. The service has appropriate arrangements for consulting with, engaging and communicating with users. It is taking action to ensure that most users or potential users have fair access to services.
- 94 The Service is generally delivering what it promised to do and is being effective in meeting local, national and regional objectives. User satisfaction is high.
- 95 Overall the Service delivers value for money, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices but comparative performance is variable. It is taking a proactive approach to managing value for money through partnerships.
- 96 We judge Fylde Borough Council's Environment service to be a **good, two-star**, service.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 97 In assessing the prospects for improvement to the service we considered the following.
- What is the service track record in delivering improvement?
 - How well does the service manage performance?
 - Does the service have the capacity to improve?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 98 The service has a track record of delivering improvement. It can evidence a record of effectively implementing change that has improved service delivery and delivered benefits for users. These include improved access to recycling facilities, revised cleansing rounds so that 90 per cent of areas fall within the top two cleanliness categories, town centre infrastructures and more information through e-government. Activities have focused on the most disadvantaged, for example, a community clean-up in a relatively deprived area. The Council has progressed well since CPA and has delivered every action in its improvement plan.
- 99 The Service has implemented changes derived from best value reviews of parks and open spaces and street and amenity cleansing but has not progressed all those arising from the review of building control and development control. The dog warden service has been revised to take a more proactive approach. The number of planning appeals being overturned has reduced following the implementation of the recommendations of a task and finish group. However, some actions have not been implemented, such as updating supplementary planning guidance.
- 100 It has delivered significant improvements in outcomes and key performance indicators that would be experienced by users. These outcomes have contributed to the achievement of the corporate objective and service aims. They are intended and have positively impacted on recipients. The service can demonstrate sustained improvements in most areas over a period of time by meeting targets and timescales. It has, for example, a distinguished track record of achievement in Britain in Bloom.
- 101 The service can demonstrate, through local and national indicators, that the changes delivered have resulted in improved performance that compares well with other service providers. Over the last three years indicators show that performance is improving for most services, user satisfaction is increasing and the service has introduced measurable changes on the ground in areas that matter to users. Recycling/composting has increased from 10.8 per cent in 2002/03 to 36 per cent in 2005/06. The expansion of recycling facilities has increased the amount of waste collected by the service per head of population but the overall amount of waste produced in the borough has reduced.

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Cleanliness of the environment has improved over the last two years, with land that has an unacceptable level of litter and detritus falling from 12 per cent to 8 per cent.

- 102 User satisfaction has increased since 2003: street cleansing (from 63 per cent to 75 per cent); refuse collection (from 82 per cent to 84 per cent); and parks and open spaces (from 75 per cent to 81 per cent). Satisfaction with planning services was as low as 31 per cent but various surveys have since shown satisfaction up to 95 per cent. Satisfaction with Fylde as a place to live has improved from 52 per cent to 91 per cent and visitor satisfaction with the area remains high at 98 per cent.
- 103 The Service has maintained a good response to environmental health service requests and processing Tree Preservation Order applications. The number of missed refuse collections reduced from 99 to 30 per 100,000 collections in 2004/05. However, responsiveness to fly-tipping within one working day fell in 2005/06 from 71 per cent to 50 per cent. Conservation area notifications decided within three weeks reduced in 2005/06 from 96 per cent to 91 per cent.
- 104 New homes built on previously developed land have been 59 per cent and 61 per cent in the last two years. This is significantly higher than 38 per cent in 2003/04. Times taken to determine planning applications have consistently improved and now meet national standards for minor and other, but not major, applications. Standard searches have consistently been carried out within ten working days. The environmental health checklist of enforcement best practice, which includes enforcement of litter and pollution offences, has increased from 23 per cent in 2001/02 to 98.6 per cent.
- 105 The capacity and track record overall demonstrate improving value for money. The Service has made effective use of resources and outcomes represent good value for money. It has secured increasing amounts of planning delivery grant in recognition of continually improving performance. Cost savings of £50,000 have been achieved by the integration of Streetscene services with some improvement in overall cleanliness. The commercial waste service generates a profit of £50,000. Building control generated a surplus of £25,759 in 2004/05. Increased activities and income from planning application fees has generated £30,000 efficiency savings with a further saving of £10,000 through the Accolaid planning system.
- 106 The comparative costs of services varied between 2002 and 2005. The comparative costs of environment services and waste collection amongst nearest neighbours have increased, as a result of service investment that has generated improvements. Planning and parks and open spaces costs were lower in comparison and environmental health costs were variable, but have latterly reduced.
- 107 Value for money and procurement principles are embedded within core service aims and objectives and clearly articulated within the service planning framework, for example, the joint procurement of waste management services. This demonstrated a clear focus on value for money, evident in strategic decision-making and day-to-day management and review.

It also took into account the long-term interests of users. Economies of scales, generated through a partnership with Wyre Borough Council, have reduced the cost of waste collection per household. Unaudited figures for 2005/06 indicate that the cost has reduced from £48.52 in 2004/05 to £39.07, which is the lowest for three years.

- 108 The Service achieved the LPSA cost-effectiveness targets (by 2005/06) for improvements in missed bins, other planning applications and recycling/composting, but not for major and minor applications. The Council did not achieve its challenging target to reduce sickness absence per employee from 10.57 days to 6.5 days over a three-year period.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 109 We considered the following.

- How good is the service's improvement planning?
- Are there arrangements and culture in place to support continuous improvement?

How good is the service's improvement planning?

- 110 The service has aims and priorities for the future that are clear, challenging and robust. It is aiming to improve the right things - that matter most to users and communities - and to address service weaknesses. It has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve over the long-term. It has translated the vision into tangible aims, ambitions and objectives for the Service. These make clear what it wants to achieve to improve the overall service quality for users, both now and in the future.
- 111 The corporate objective - amended in the Corporate Plan 2006/07 to *'improve, protect and enhance the streetscene and local environment'* - is consistent with the community plan vision. Each service area has aims, objectives or a vision that collectively set out what the service wants to achieve. Consumer Wellbeing and Protection and Streetscene have the vision *'to work together to provide a safe, healthy and clean environment for residents and visitors to Fylde borough'*. The Service aims to establish Fylde's parks as some of the finest in the region and balance conservation and protection with an appropriate range of high quality recreational opportunities that fulfil users' needs. This includes conserving and enhancing the wildlife and fostering an appreciation of ecology and the natural world. The purpose of Strategic Planning and Development is to promote economic, environmental and social wellbeing through planned sustainable development.
- 112 The service has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through regeneration but has not set out how this will be achieved in practice. It is developing a vision for the future of St Annes-on-Sea as a classic resort which aims to build on and complete the regeneration and heritage work already undertaken. The identification of such a niche approach is innovative and, if funded, will lead to a sustainable future for the town. Other activities include the development of a market towns initiative for Kirkham and the rural Fylde.

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However, the service does not have a comprehensive regeneration strategy for the borough that incorporates environmental objectives and key success factors.

- 113 The service has aims that are stretching and which aspire to make a real and measurable difference for service users, including the most vulnerable. They make clear the outcomes that can realistically be achieved and the timescales and are supported key actions, targets and measures of success in the annual Corporate Performance Statement and business unit service plans. Targets are generally consistent with the best 25 per cent of councils and are set over a three-year period having regard to capacity, comparative data, concerns of users and non-users, local and national priorities and previous performance. The LMWMS contains challenging targets to recycle/compost 36 per cent of household waste by 2005 and 58 per cent by 2015 compared with the national targets of 25 per cent and 33 per cent respectively.
- 114 Targets are not challenging for all service areas. The Council has reduced the target from 85 per cent to 80 per cent for Fylde Direct calls to be answered in 30 seconds. The service has targets to reduce the number of contaminated land sites of concern but only to increase to 10 per cent sites on which detailed information to decide whether remediation is necessary.
- 115 The service has translated its vision and aims into specific priorities for the short, medium and long-term. The aims and future plans are generally co-ordinated and deliverable. The Council has made clear what are, and what are not, its priorities for improvement. Activities are based on a robust planning framework that ensures that the Council's priorities are articulated in service priorities. The Service's aims address corporate and national priorities, for example, the need to minimise waste and maximise recycling, regeneration and the 'Liveability Agenda. Aims and objectives contribute to community safety.
- 116 The Service can show the links between corporate aims through to community, individual and service plans, objectives, priorities, standards, and targets. This means that staff, who are involved in service planning, know what is expected of them and how their work contributes to overall aims.
- 117 Aims are based on a sound knowledge of the challenges and opportunities faced, including the views and needs of users now and in the future. The service has gained this knowledge through consultation for the community and corporate plans, Listening Days and on specific issues such as regeneration schemes and the renovation of Ashton Gardens, St Annes-on-Sea and Park View playing fields, Lytham. The information provides a good basis for clear priorities and ensures that aspirations, concerns and needs are taken into account, gaining consensus and commitment from stakeholders. However, the SCI does not relate to other community involvement or engagement work nor links to the Council's communications strategy or the work of the FLSP. Without recognition of the relationship duplication of effort or confusion for the public are likely.

- 118** The service has a range of action plans and strategies that support service plans to deliver improvements in the quality of services. These include parks, playing pitch, play area and tourism strategies and historic building restoration programmes within St Annes-on-Sea and Kirkham conservation areas. They include the management and maintenance of contaminated land, parks and open spaces, sand dunes, sea defences and waste management. Intended improvements include a proactive approach to enforcement of fly-tipping, planning and other waste legislation and recycling bring sites. The Council's 'Trees 4 Fylde' initiative aims to increase woodland cover by two hectares over the next two years. Conservation area reviews have been agreed on a three-year rolling programme. The Service has initiated an environmental review of sandwinning operations. The formulation of a Biodiversity Strategy is included in the Streetscene service plan. A project plan is in place to integrate Fylde Direct and back-office systems.
- 119** Service planning is now closely aligned with financial planning. It is designed to ensure that a realistic assessment of resources is made to deliver objectives and targets. Action plans identify: additional resources above those already contained within the service, such as a successful grant application in future years; services and initiatives that are dependent on external funding; new or developing computer systems that are needed to effectively deliver services in the future and the resource implications; and the implications of holding property. Delivery against these plans would represent improving use of resources and will help the service demonstrate better value for money in its planning and delivery.
- 120** The service has clear and ambitious targets to improve efficiency and value for money. It has identified over £200,000 of cashable, efficiency savings or improved service efficiencies. These savings have been, or are to be achieved, through, for example, a corporate fuelling service, increased productivity in dealing with planning applications, integration of grounds maintenance services restructuring the management of Streetscene and use of information technology. Economies of scale through the delivery of the waste management contract for Wyre Borough Council have generated savings of £50,000 with anticipated savings of £170,000 on full year costs and by rationalising vehicle maintenance. Resource implications against potential outcomes are also considered; for example, the Service has resolved that additional investment to further improve cleanliness would not be best value in view of other priorities.
- 121** It is also exploring other opportunities. The use of private sector consultants in the development control service and working with other councils allows the service to compare and challenge value for money and inform its future approach to procurement. The grounds maintenance is to be exposed to competition to ensure that value for money is being delivered. Potential savings from co-mingled collections of recyclables are being investigated. The Service's actions and plans for managing and improving value for money include the effective use of technology to improve services and increase efficiency. The Council intends to review high cost service areas through business process engineering with a neighbouring council but does not have an action plan.

Are there arrangements and culture in place to support continuous improvement?

- 122 Arrangements and a culture are in place to support continuous improvement. Leadership of the service is effective. Performance management arrangements are largely in place to drive and monitor progress, review impact and deliver improved value for money. The Service learns from high performing and other providers, user feedback and its own experience.
- 123 The service has active, visible and effective management and leadership, recognised by partners, staff and other stakeholders. Managers have a balance of general management and service specific competences. Leadership, from senior managers and councillors sets the tone of the organisation by creating a climate of openness and transparency. Conflicts between councillors and officers in relation to planning functions have been addressed.
- 124 Councillors and managers have communicated the ambitions, objectives and vision so that staff have a good understanding and are clear about the culture and values of the organisation necessary for delivery. Line managers assess their performance through appraisals. Valuing staff and creating a 'can do' culture is a council value. This understanding about specific objectives is not as strong amongst partners.
- 125 The Council's values also include providing equal access to services and effective leadership for the community. The service promotes sustainable development, makes an effective contribution to the work of the FLSP and facilitates a range of environmental interest groups relating to, for example, airports and the nuclear industry. It is taking a lead on the classic resort concept. The Council supports the FLSP's community projects fund through which improvements have been made to local parks. It contributed significant funding to the redevelopment of St Annes-on-Sea. The Service has taken a leading role in the implementation of the LMWMS. The Council provides support and advice on design to parish councils in their preparation of village plans and appraisals.
- 126 Councillors have demonstrated their willingness to take tough decisions, such as the introduction of fortnightly refuse collections, side waste policies and the sale of land attached to Ashton Gardens as part of the renovation scheme.
- 127 Performance management, including service planning and staff appraisals, has been strengthened. Councillors and managers are clear about their roles. Processes are in place to enable them to manage and measure performance. The arrangements provide a basis to monitor progress, review impact and maintain a strategic focus on delivery against established plans, standards, targets and timescales and to take corrective action on variations in performance. Officers are accountable for services that are perceived to be underperforming. The Council has a project planning framework for the delivery of key actions.
- 128 The service produces regular performance information that covers local and national performance indicators and user satisfaction, but not aspects such as service accessibility and impact of enforcement actions. Information is generally simple to access and understand, enabling the Council to understand how well the service is performing, including against other councils.

The reasons for variations in performance are reported on an exception basis. It is not always presented in a format that links achievement to objectives. The information is used proactively to drive improvement, enabling the Council to take prompt action when performance is not meeting targets, such as improving response times for dealing with planning applications. The Development Control committee now meets on a three weekly cycle in order to consider planning applications. Users are informed about achievements through Fylde in Focus - the FLSP's newspaper - and the annual Corporate Performance Statement.

- 129** Performance management is particularly effective in Streetscene and Consumer Wellbeing and Protection. Systems for the enforcement of air quality and littering legislation and other activities, for example, allow for the scheduling of work programmes and monitoring of response times and performance. Progress on waste management activities is analysed monthly and compared to previous years and action is taken to address variances.
- 130** Performance management is not as effective in other areas. The service does not always take the action it can to reduce the need for planning enforcement and as a result backlogs build up. It lacks criteria to resolve cases where the person causing the breach refuses to respond but formal enforcement action is not justified. It is not clear how SPG will be monitored. The Local Plan lacks measures, outcomes and targets for most of the policies aimed at protecting or enhancing the built and natural environments. The Service has not clearly set out the desired outcomes or measures of success for regeneration. Some targets and output indicators are not included in the LDF Annual Monitoring Report. Without such measures it is not possible to ensure that priorities are achieved.
- 131** The Council does not have a process for ensuring consistency in plans between building control and development control, or for making effective use of staff to check out planning conditions. The building control function does not consistently identify buildings that are not built in accordance with planning permission or that are likely to need planning permission. No formal agreement exists between the two functions. The Service negotiates with developers to improve the quality of design but does not monitor what it achieves through this activity.
- 132** The Council has a range of complementary mechanisms to help it to sustain its focus on these priority areas through means such as agendas, a forward plan, scrutiny committees, task and finish groups and the FLSP sub-group. Performance information is reported quarterly to the Performance Improvement Scrutiny Committee.
- 133** The Council has an adequate track record of financial management. Through the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget process councillors challenge budget allocations and scrutinise proposals for growth and savings.
- 134** Performance management arrangements have not yet been fully developed to drive and deliver improved value for money. The Service has some information on relative costs but it is not using benchmarking effectively across all service areas to improve performance and value for money. Comparative information and profiles are generally restricted to an analysis of best value performance indicators.

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Information on some costs and quality is regularly reported to councillors and managers but is not used to challenge how these compare to others. Whilst councillors and senior managers identify and pursue opportunities to reduce costs, or improve quality within existing costs, a value for money culture is still developing and is not embedded into priorities and decision-making across the Council and all service areas.

- 135 The review of partnerships has looked at their added value and performance management. Recommendations have been made relating to improving accountability, arrangements and performance management to strengthen the impact on achieving the Council's objectives.
- 136 The service learns from high performing and other providers, user feedback and its own experience. It understands its strengths and weaknesses in the context of the challenges, opportunities and threats that it faces, with a good level of self-awareness. It has a well publicised, user-friendly and supportive system for service-users, staff and others to submit complaints, compliments, grievances, representations and suggestions. Customer satisfaction surveys and complaint analysis are used to inform future developments. Complaints are recorded and collected centrally and are reviewed for repeated service failures and/or patterns. However, user feedback in relation to individual services is not co-ordinated.
- 137 The Council has learnt from other councils' practices on specific projects, for example, the contact centre and performance management. The service is examining other councils' approaches to the sponsorship of community landscaped areas and development control. The service learned from the regeneration in St Annes-on-Sea to develop a town centre strategy for Kirkham - this will allow key socio-economic as well as physical targets to be set and monitored. The approach to future planning enforcement has been influenced by the loss of service effectiveness when this function was previously incorporated into routine work. Benchmarking is used, for example, in environmental health, but not all services. The parks service has benchmarked its organisational structure with a beacon authority.
- 138 The Council responds positively to internal and external review, using the results to improve performance. Scrutiny committees provide challenge in developing policy and priorities. The FLSP sub-groups provide further challenge. The Council has established a Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee to challenge its approach to service improvement and future policy formulation and implementation.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 139 The service has access to the appropriate finances, skills and tools to deliver improvement. It has the people and capability to deliver its service priorities, for example, by recruiting officers to manage and develop parks and open spaces from good performing councils. A lack of capacity in the development control and forward planning functions has affected the progress of some activities and determination of planning applications. This is being addressed through the recruitment of key officers. However, the contribution that the planning service can make to the Council's corporate objectives is not maximised.

- 140** The service has tackled capacity issues in development control in a pragmatic way, through flexible working and appointing consultants to process routine planning applications. It has appointed a planning enforcement officer and is prioritising its backlog of cases according to their impact on the environment and local communities. An additional post has been created to support conservation area reviews over a three-year period. However, its capacity in terms of policy planning is limited, despite pursuing some joint working in this area with neighbouring authorities in order to enhance its capacity. Slippage has already taken place in the production of planning documents.
- 141** Capacity has been enhanced through joint working on, for example, sustainability appraisals and SPG. The service is working with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment to inform its future parks plans. The Council has increased its capacity for effective communications through an arrangement with Blackpool Borough Council. However, it is not maximising opportunities, such as sharing building control staff and work across boundaries, despite the existence of a Lancashire Agreement.
- 142** Councillors and officers are generally clear about their accountabilities, responsibilities and operational and strategic roles and the boundaries between them. This has been strengthened at the political level by creating a Cabinet system of governance and portfolio holders for Community and Social Wellbeing, Development and Regeneration and Streetscene. The recommendations of the task and finish group on the operation of the planning function and councillor/officer relationships, which had been a barrier to effective community leadership and decision-making, have been implemented. More positive working relationships are now in place, supported by the introduction of the Planning Policy Scrutiny Committee. The percentage of successful planning appeals has latterly reduced but in 2005/06 the average was 63 per cent compared with a target of 40 per cent.
- 143** The Council has restructured services to provide a more strategic approach to the achievement of its objectives and to increase synergies between services. Streetscene is now responsible for all environmental maintenance services, resulted in increased efficiencies and effectiveness. A Strategic Planning and Development business unit now has an overall purpose to promote economic, environmental and social well-being through sustainable development. The service restructures should help to maximise the service's impact in achieving the Council's objectives.
- 144** Staff generally work well across service areas, for example, in community clean-ups, determining major planning applications and tackling littering issues at a recent horse fair in the borough. Officers are aware of their responsibility to act as 'eyes and ears' and report littering problems to ensure that environmental quality is maintained. Internal communications are good with regular team briefings and internal newsletters. Waste management officers receive details of planning applications to assess the suitability of domestic premises for refuse collection and recycling facilities. Fylde Direct is notified in advance of changes to refuse collections so users can be advised. However, in some instances calls referred to back office staff have not always been actioned.

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This reduces the quality of the user experience and creates additional pressure on front-line staff who seek to promote customer care.

- 145 The service is using information technology to deliver service objectives and improvements, such as to access information through internet kiosks, improve communications and schedule refuse collection rounds. It has invested in software systems to improve efficiencies, integration and performance management in building control/planning and grounds maintenance services. Planned improvements include document imaging and wider use of on-line information. However, it is not used as effectively as it could be. For example, front office (Team Knowledge) and back-office systems are not yet integrated, which causes duplication and does not maximise potential efficiencies. The Service has plans to address this weakness to improve access for users and potential users. Furthermore, the demands on Fylde Direct means that not all customer enquiries are entered on the Team Knowledge system.
- 146 The Service can evidence effective human resource and financial planning. Staff are supported to perform to the best of their abilities. Grounds Maintenance staff have, for example, achieved NVQs in Horticulture. Fylde Direct staff are accredited by the Institute of Customer Services and more staff are being trained to meet demand. A range of staff are authorised to issue fixed penalty tickets for littering offences. Enhancing capacity amongst officers is good practice. The dog warden service has been reconfigured so that patrols are targeted at problem areas. Both councillors and officers undertake development programmes - a charter has recognised the work on member development. Employees have comprehensive training plans that are co-ordinated to ensure the maximum use of resources.
- 147 The Council has strengthened its human resource policies to maximise internal capacity and to ensure that future service improvements are provided for. It works with the FLSP and other partners to enhance capacity and other councils on the joint provision of services. Staff resources are deployed flexibly and strategically to meet demand, such as in grounds maintenance with the employment of seasonal gardeners and apprentices to balance an ageing workforce. The Council and Service are taking a more proactive approach to workforce planning to meet future demands as, for example, the training of environmental health officers. However, some staff feel more involved, supported and valued, with a particular contrast with those in planning and streetscene functions.
- 148 Sickness absence continues to be problem across the Council and within the Service, which adds to the costs of services and, in some areas, has affected responsiveness. In 2005/06, 11.6 days per employee were lost compared with 10.8 days in 2004/05, when there had been an improvement from previous years. In Streetscene 18.8 days per employee were lost in 2005/06, with 1,855 days lost in refuse collection and amenity cleansing due to sickness or accident injury, compared to 1,251 in 2004/05. Although the Council is seeking to actively manage its attendance at work policies this is not having significant impacts, despite challenging targets for improvement.

- 149** The Council continues to develop its financial planning to commit resources in line with priorities through the MTFs. It achieved a balanced budget in 2005/06 and has identified cashable and non-cashable efficiency savings as required by the Government. Options include a significant disinvestment in some service areas with identified impacts and risks. The Council has a record of investing in services such as planning that have been under-performing.
- 150** The Council and Service can demonstrate consideration of diversity and equalities. They are more integral to the Council's culture, reflected in mandatory training and a Navajo Chartermark. All staff have attended awareness training, which was also made available to councillors, and it is included in the corporate induction programme. Managers have been trained in carrying out impact assessments. The Council and Service have yet to develop systems to monitor performance in relation to such issues, although a cross-service working group has been established for equalities and diversity. The Council has commenced work with DIALOG - the Employers Organisation - to undertake a diagnostic assessment and develop an action plan to implement the Equality Standard for Local Government. The service's activities contribute to wider policies on community safety, social inclusion and young people.
- 151** The Service has a good track record of working with partners to achieve its objectives. It works with the other Lancashire councils to raise waste awareness through regional and national campaigns and, for example, to produce policy and technical guidance on building control. Fly-tipping and unlawful advertisements are now being tackled proactively with other agencies. Service staff are actively involved in delivering the environmental priorities of the FLSP and make a positive contribution to community safety strategies through community clean-ups. However, it is not making full use of all voluntary and community groups.
- 152** The Service works with partners to achieve biodiversity and conservation objectives, for example, the Ribble Discovery Centre on environmental education programmes. The Dunes Management Plan is a partnership initiative that seeks to address biodiversity, recreation and sea defence issues. The Service participates in the Lancashire Biodiversity Partnership and is represented on a range of groups to protect and enhance the Ribble estuary. It works with other councils and agencies on sustainability appraisals and on an employment land use study.
- 153** The service has an open, innovative approach to procurement within a corporate framework that continues to develop in applying best practice and achieve improved value for money, not necessarily lowest cost. The Council is developing a joint procurement strategy with Wyre Borough Council but this does not include environmental standards. The waste contract affords further, potential efficiencies around cross-border working, a centralised depot and fleet and surplus capacity.

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- 154 The service has engaged effectively in strategic partnering with evidence of improvements in services and facilities. It worked with a range of local and strategic partners in the regeneration of St Annes-on-Sea and continues to do so in developing the concept of a classic resort. This approach will maximise the potential of achieving support for the classic resort pilot designation, although no decisions have yet been made about the necessary funding.
- 155 The Council has reviewed its partnerships to determine if value for money and service quality are being delivered in relation to environmental objectives. These reviews have led to closer scrutiny of performance and agreed performance indicators to measure progress.
- 156 The service is investing and attracting inward investment to deliver improvements both directly and in partnership. It has established partnership working as a way of accessing external funding and enhancing its capacity to deliver on its priorities, for example, the joint production of village plans and involvement with the Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative.
- 157 The Service has a good record in attracting external funding, including over £0.5 million for new waste collection services. The Service and partners have been successful in securing over £1.5 million through the Heritage Lottery Fund for the renovation of Ashton Gardens. The Council has also allocated £0.5 million of capital funding to support this scheme. Other successful bids with partners include Football Foundation funding to improve local sports facilities and the Promenade Gardens. Over £2.4 million was attracted for the regeneration of St Annes-on-Sea, encouraged by the targeted use of public expenditure.
- 158 The FLSP has allocated funding for the review of conservation areas in the borough by a local civic society and for a fly-tipping awareness campaign. Funding is being provided through the Waste Performance Efficiency Grant to improve recycling bring sites. The Service received £0.5 million through the Planning Delivery Grant over the last three years as a result of improvements in performance. Grants from the Employer's Organisation contribute towards the training costs of environmental health officers.
- 159 The Service has secured developers' contributions to improve the local environment, such as open spaces and play areas. The Service has not used all discretionary powers available in pursuing regeneration, including the selective use of purchase powers and a clear policy on the use of section 106 planning agreements to secure environmental enhancements. The use of such powers could prove significant in acting as a community leader, driving forward regeneration and increasing the impact of the service.

Summary

- 160 The service has a track record of delivering improvements. It can evidence a record of effectively implementing change that has led to improvements in service delivery and in outcomes that would be experienced by users, including those in disadvantaged communities. The direction of key performance indicators over the last three years is positive. The overall trend is towards lower comparative costs.

- 161** The service has improved its service planning framework. It has a vision of what it wants to achieve and a challenging agenda to further improve the built and natural environment, but this is not always supported by key measures of success. The service is seeking to improve the right things that matter most to communities and is addressing service weaknesses. Performance management systems continue to be developed but it is not as effective in some areas.
- 162** The service has access to the appropriate, tools and finances to deliver improvement. The Council has invested in the service to deliver future improvements and uses resources to address priority issues. Leadership of the service is generally effective and councillors, managers and staff are committed to service improvements. Human resource planning and development are improving. The service has effective procurement practices and works well with partners. It has a record of attracting external investment to deliver improvement.
- 163** We judge Fylde Borough Council's Environment Service to have **promising prospects** for improvement.