

Service Inspection Report

July 2006



Environment Inspection

South Holland District Council

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Service Inspection

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

Audit Commission service inspections should:

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

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website 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

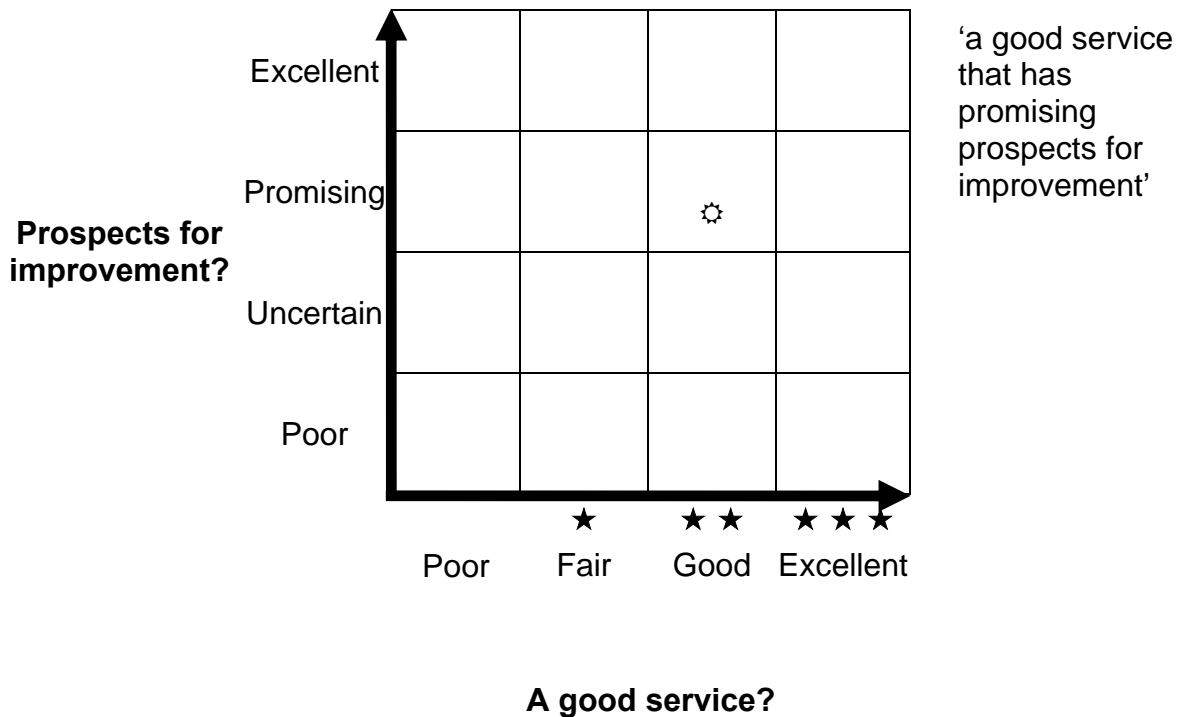
- 1 South Holland District Council is situated in the East Midlands region. The area consists of primarily small rural communities and five main towns. The population of the area is 80,700, living in 35,604 households. 2.8 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities and there are growing numbers of migrant workers coming into the area, predominantly from Eastern Europe and EU communities for agricultural and food manufacturing work.
- 2 The main industries in the area are agriculture, manufacturing and distribution. Unemployment is low at 1.5 per cent but average wages are 18 per cent below the national average. The district is ranked 210th out of 354 English councils on the Indices of Deprivation 2000.
- 3 The Council comprises of 38 elected councillors and the Conservative party has overall control. The overall budget for the year 2005/06 is £44.9 million with capital expenditure of £7.7 million. The Council's vision shared with the Community Plan is to be a 'thriving, living and working rural community'.
- 4 The environment service has a key part to play in the delivery of the Community Plan priorities of 'Sustainable Communities' and the Council's agenda of 'providing a safe, secure, and healthy place to live' and 'developing a thriving rural community'.
- 5 The focus of the inspection included the following elements of the service: planning including enforcement activity, waste management and street scene; management of open space and landscaped areas; air, noise and water quality and litter control functions of environmental health; and energy efficiency and accessibility activities in the building control service. The service has a budget of £5.7 million for 2005/06 and employs in the region of 132 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.
- 6 The Council is providing a good environment service. It is delivering a clean and well managed environment including: a reliable refuse and recycling service; clean and well maintained streets and open spaces; effective monitoring of, and enforcement on, environmental, air and water quality issues; and a planning service which is delivering environmental improvements and securing new facilities and infra-structure improvements for local communities. Access to the service is good and the service is catering for people with diverse needs within the community. The cost of the service is below average and public satisfaction with the service is above average. However, the Council does not have an agreed or consistent approach to assessing the value for money of its services.

- 7 The environment service has promising prospects for improvement. The Council can demonstrate a track record of improvements to the service which have resulted in a better service for local people. There is also a trend of general improvement across all areas of the service, reflected in national performance indicators, over the last three years. There is adequate capacity to deliver future improvements to the service and training and development is provided for council staff and members. Key plans are in place to guide service delivery. These are backed up with a performance management system and performance is managed. However, the future direction of the service is not fully explained in current plans, for example, the Recycling Strategy has an end date of December 2006 and there is no draft, or published, plan to succeed this. In addition, although the service manages its performance, the way that it does this could be improved. In particular, there is a lack of transparent measurable objectives for parts of the service and clear resource needs to deliver actions are not routinely identified so that it is not consistently clear what the service is expected to deliver or how it will do this.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed South Holland District Council as providing a ‘good’, two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

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.

9 The service is a good, two-star service because:

- it is delivering a range of good outcomes in terms of a sustainable and well managed environment including: a reliable refuse and recycling service; clean and well maintained streets and open spaces; effective monitoring of, and enforcement on, environmental, air and water quality issues; and a planning service which is delivering environmental improvements and securing new facilities and infra-structure improvements for local communities;
- the service is proactive in managing for biodiversity, and flood risk and alleviation and can demonstrate impacts from this work, for example the setting up of a number of school, and community, based nature conservation projects across the district;
- the customer services centre provides effective access and accessibility to the service has improved through an enhanced website. The service is accessible for people living in other parts of the district, through the provision of service access points at Long Sutton Market Hall and through a travelling service in association with the mobile police van;
- current performance of the planning service is above Government targets and service performance on waste is mixed but there are good levels of public satisfaction with the waste, street cleaning and recycling services; and
- costs of the service are low, performance overall is above average, and public satisfaction with most aspects of the service is above average.

10 But:

- user feedback is not routinely sought across all service areas or proactively used to inform service improvement or test service information; and
- the Council does not systematically address how it assesses, or drives improvement in, the value for money of its services.

11 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the service has a track record of delivering service improvements such as improvements to street cleaning, improved recycling rate, and significant improvement in planning performance;
- councillors and officers are clear about the direction of the services, and these are translated through corporate strategies into staff actions;
- there is adequate capacity to deliver future improvements to the service. The service is addressing recruitment and retention issues in a variety of ways such as sponsorships, and training schemes, and staff receive ongoing training;
- key plans are in place to guide service delivery;
- there is a performance management system and performance is managed; and
- the service is open to external challenge and learning.

12 But:

- the future of the service is not fully explained in plans, for example, there are no targets in the Recycling Strategy beyond 2005/06 and it does not indicate how the Council will improve the service in the future; and
- although performance at a service level is managed, it could be improved. In particular, there is a lack of transparent measurable objectives for parts of the service and clear resource needs to deliver actions are not routinely identified so that it is not consistently clear what the service is expected to deliver or how it will do this.

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 Develop meaningful VFM indicators for the service areas which take into account service quality, levels of customer access/satisfaction and cost and apply these as a basis for identifying future VFM improvements by:

- identifying factors which impact on the costs of the service such as geographical characteristics, policies etc;*
- using clear gross and net costs for the service areas and benchmarking these with similar services to assess how they compare and how they can be improved;*
- agreeing meaningful ways of assessing the qualitative outcomes from the service areas and levels of customer satisfaction; and*
- assessing the cost benefit from partnership activity in terms of both the resource invested and relevant returns and the delivery of outcomes against corporate priorities.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- to understand and improve the current VFM of the service areas. The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by December 2006.

This recommendation is complementary to but does not duplicate the issues arising from the Use of Resources work completed earlier this year.

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

*Recommendation**R2 Improve communication with service customers by:*

- *expanding engagement with local people and service customers to inform future service improvements, for example, by establishing user groups for planning and seeking feedback at the point of service contact;*
- *ensuring that service methods and plans provide for the needs of the diverse customer base that they serve;*
- *illustrating transparent and meaningful links between corporate priorities and service objectives and targets in corporate, and service, literature so that local people and stakeholders are clear on what the Council is trying to achieve; and*
- *ensuring that service policies and documents are written in plain English, meet the needs of their target audience and are available in different formats to meet customer need.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- that service improvements will be tailored to local need.

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

*Recommendation**R3 Articulate a clear vision for the future development of the service for the medium-term and ensure that this is delivered:*

- *through detailed, and SMART (specific, measurable, assigned, realistic and timetabled), business plans which are clear in terms of how their initiatives, actions and targets contribute to the delivery of community, and corporate, priorities;*
- *by ensuring that service business plans are translated into SMART targets for individual staff work plans; and*
- *by ensuring that regular, and effective, monitoring of service performance against milestones and targets is carried out and that corrective action is taken where performance targets are not met.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- that it will be clearer to assess how the service areas are delivering against community and corporate priorities.

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

12 Environment Inspection | Recommendations

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Report

Context

The locality

- 14 South Holland District Council is situated in the East Midlands region. The area consists of 74,238 hectares consisting of primarily small rural communities and five main towns of Spalding (containing around a third of the population), Holbeach, Long Sutton, Crowland and Sutton Bridge. The population of the area is 80,700, living in 35,604 households.. The population grew by 13.4 per cent between the 1991 census and the 2001 census and is predicted to grow by 9.1 per cent by 2010, which is higher than the predicted national average of 5.6 per cent. The average house price is lower than the regional and national averages, but affordable housing is a key issue for the Council and the availability of previously developed (brownfield) sites is limited within the district.
- 15 2.8 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities and there are growing numbers of migrant workers, coming into the area for agricultural and food manufacturing work. It is estimated that around 8 per cent of the local population is comprised of migrant workers, for whom, English is not the first language. The proportion of older people in the population is growing at a faster rate than other age groups, with the 80 plus age group is projected to grow by 53 per cent by 2011.
- 16 Around a third of the district has been reclaimed from the sea and much of the area is vulnerable to river, or coastal, flooding so that climate change and flood alleviation are key issues. The area has 500 listed buildings, 13 conservation areas and there are three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), two National Nature Reserves and one local reserve including a variety of habitats including: lowland damp grasslands, fen meadows, mudflats and salt marshes. Air quality is 'fair' compared to nearby urban areas and water quality is generally 'fair' except downstream of key settlements on the rivers Welland and Nene where the quality is 'poor'. Open space provision is inadequate in some of the main towns and access to the countryside is limited, largely because 80 per cent of the district is Grade 1 agricultural land and most of the land is in agricultural production.
- 17 The main industries in the area are agriculture, horticulture, food manufacturing and distribution. Unemployment is low at 1.5 per cent compared to the National average of 2 per cent (March 2005 Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures) but average wages are 18 per cent below the National average. Economic diversification is a priority for the district which is ranked 210th out of 354 on the Indices of Deprivation 2004, where the highest is the most deprived. There are no wards in the most deprived 10 per cent in the country but Deeping St Nicholas is in the 20 per cent most deprived wards. Around 50 per cent of the population have has access to the internet in the district.

The Council

- 18 The Council comprises 38 elected councillors. The Conservative party has overall control with 26 of the 38 seats. 11 seats are Independents and one seat is Labour and Cooperative. A Leader and Cabinet model was adopted in May 2002 to govern the business of the Council. The scrutiny function is carried out by the Policy Development and Performance Monitoring Panels.
- 19 The political arrangements are supported by the Strategic Management Team which comprises the Chief Executive and two Strategic Directors, which in turn is supported by eight Heads of Service. In total, the Council employs 408 full-time equivalent staff
- 20 The Council's overall budget for the year 2005/06 is £44.9 million with capital expenditure of £7.7 million. The Council became debt free in April 2004.
- 21 The Council's vision shared with the Community Plan is to be a 'thriving, living and working rural community'. The corporate plan aims to develop and promote this vision through the four themes of its mission statement:
- 'Providing'- To provide a safe, secure and healthy place to live.
 - 'Developing'- To develop a thriving rural community.
 - 'Leading'- To be a leading edge authority providing value for money, quality services.
 - 'Listening'- To listen and involve the community and work with partners.
- 22 The Council was assessed as a 'fair' council following a Comprehensive Performance Appraisal (CPA) inspection in 2004 and was scored as a 2 out of a possible 4 for the value for money (VFM) of its services in a Use of Resources Assessment in 2006.

The service inspection

- 23 The inspection had a broad scope. It focussed on the strategic operation of the environment service and covered the areas of:
- planning policy and outcomes, including enforcement activity;
 - waste management and street scene;
 - management of open space and landscaped areas;
 - air, noise and water quality and litter control functions of environmental health; and
 - environmental sustainability (where not covered above).

It excluded: play areas, community safety, health and safety, and food safety activities.

- 24 The refuse, recycling, and cleaning services were previously inspected in 2001 when the service was assessed as being a good two star service with unlikely prospects for improvement. Following on from the earlier inspection work, the waste recycling and cleaning services were given a lighter touch as part of this inspection. The Council was assessed as a planning standards authority by the (then) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for 2004/05 because of its poor performance on the speed of determining 'minor' and 'other' planning applications from July 2002 to June 2003 and it was a standards authority for 'minor' applications for 2005/06. The Government Office for the East Midlands (on behalf of ODPM) has been working with the authority to help it improve its performance in these areas. As a result, this inspection does not focus on the systems underpinning the processing of planning applications.
- 25 In reaching its judgements, the inspection team has placed emphasis on the current quality of service and improvements made to the service over the last three years.

The environment service

- 26 The environment service is part of the Directorate of Rural Services. The work is organised into the two service areas of planning and development, and community and neighbourhood services. Planning and development includes policy, development control, and building control. Community and neighbourhood services include environmental health, environmental protection, waste management, street cleaning, and grounds maintenance. All services are delivered in-house.
- 27 The inspected service has a budget of £5.7 million for 2005/06 and employs in the region of 132 full-time equivalent staff. The planning service received a planning delivery grant allocation of £61,000 in March 2004, which rose to around £243,000 in March 2005 and £370,000 in March 2006, as a result of improved service.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 28 The Community Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan share the same vision: 'to develop and promote South Holland as a thriving, living and working rural community'. Three of the Community Plan priorities relate to the environment service:
- Sustainable Communities;
 - Economic and Regeneration; and
 - Thriving and Safe Communities.

29 The Corporate Plan 2006/09 aims to deliver this vision through four mission statements and one key priority. The mission statements are as follows.

- 'Providing'- To provide a safe, secure and healthy place to live.
- 'Developing'- To develop a thriving rural community.
- 'Leading'- To be a leading edge authority providing value for money, quality services.
- 'Listening'- To listen and involve the community and work with partners.

And the key priority is:

- getting the basics right - collecting the refuse and keeping the area clean and tidy comes before everything else.

30 The Council uses its corporate strategies and plans to underpin the corporate plan and to expand on how its vision and mission statements will be delivered. The plans that relate to the environment service are the recycling strategy, bio-diversity strategy and the local plan.

31 The recycling strategy 2004/06 gives the Council's waste management objectives.

- Priority 1 - achieve waste reduction in the district:
 - outcome - waste to landfill per household reduces annually.
- Priority 2 - achieve Government targets for South Holland as set out in the National Waste Strategy:
 - outcome - achieve the Government's 24 per cent recycling target; and
 - outcome - improve customer satisfaction with the service.
- Priority 3 - provide effective education and publicity:
 - outcome - improved awareness; and
 - outcome - support the principles of improved customer satisfaction.
- Priority 4 - work in partnership with others to achieve national, regional and local targets and objectives:
 - outcome - stronger partnerships;
 - outcome - achieve shared objectives; and
 - outcome - stronger contracts and reduced financial risk.

- 32** The re-deposit draft local plan shares the same vision as the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan, providing the policy framework to deliver these. The Council's key planning objectives and outcomes are to:
- deliver the national priority of sustainable communities;
 - provide a total of 7,600 new dwellings between 2001 and 2021, with a target of one third of all new developments being affordable housing;
 - ensure a thriving rural community by encouraging diverse but sustainable employment opportunities in appropriate locations in the district to minimise travel to work ;
 - protect sites of nature conservation value and bio-diversity;
 - encourage energy efficient development and renewable energy sources;
 - minimise the threat of flood risk to the district;
 - reduce private transport and increase the opportunities for sustainable forms of public transport; and
 - ensure the high quality of new design.
- 33** The service business plans set out the service aims and actions to achieve them. These plans link to the corporate mission statements and to the objectives in the corporate plans and strategies. The key aims are as follows.
- The aim of the Planning and Development Services unit is to deliver a high quality, consistent, policy planning, development control and building control service across the whole of South Holland. The critical success factors are:
 - establish and maintain high levels of customer satisfaction;
 - input to and influence of Regional Planning Guidance and the Lincolnshire Structure Plan;
 - publish the next draft of the South Holland District Local Plan;
 - prepare and submit to the Government Office our Local Development Scheme for the transition to the new plan making system;
 - keep our housing land availability information up-to-date; and
 - make sure that we secure the health, safety and welfare and convenience of people in and about a building or structure.

- The waste services team aims to: make sure that every home receives a full refuse collection service on the scheduled day each week; and provide a variety of recycling initiatives to reduce total tonnages of waste entering the waste stream and so that the population of South Holland can actively assist in reducing the amount of waste going to landfill and increase the amount of waste going for recycling. The critical success factors are:
 - continue to provide weekly domestic refuse collection and street cleaning within service specifications;
 - achieve recycling targets within government and policy requirements;
 - develop an Integrated Waste Management Strategy - with partners; and
 - comply with EU Landfill directive and National Waste Strategy – with partners.
- The open space management team aims to: keep streets and roads clean and free from litter; improve the environment and instil pride/generate good levels of satisfaction from the residents of South Holland; and to maintain the environment of the highway for the safe movement of people and vehicles by carrying out cleansing and other environmental maintenance to a planned and published standard in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Code of Practice for Litter and Refuse. The critical success factors are:
 - to comply with Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Code of Practice on litter and refuse.
- The environmental protection team aims to protect the community and enhance and sustain the quality of life of the residents of the district by eliminating or reducing environmental threats to their health, safety or welfare. The critical success factors are:
 - continuous air quality monitoring; and
 - environmental monitoring.

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

Access, customer care and community focus

- 34 Customer access to advice about the services is good. The main point of access to the service, via the customer services centre is efficient and caters for a range of users needs and the Council is bringing services out to the community. Electronic access to the service via the website and planning portal is well designed, easy to navigate and provides a good range of service functions. Standards that the public can expect of the service are in place and are publicised. However, service publications are not all written in plain English and the service does not routinely seek the views of service users to inform improvements to the service.

35 In 2001, the Council set up a contact centre for the environment service as part of an internal re-organisation. This was trialled as the first point of contact for all environmental health enquiries and, in 2004, became the primary point of contact for all person to person, and telephone, enquiries. The centre provides effective access to the service in a number of ways:

- Staff in the contact centre are able to resolve around 80 per cent of initial inquiries and are able to hand over more complex issues to officers for resolution, as both building control and planning services have a duty officer to pick these up.
- Telephone access is straight forward with a single telephone contact number for all service enquiries, served by thirty call lines, which ensure that few calls are missed.
- Customer research is conducted at the contact centre to monitor satisfaction with enquiry resolution and waiting times, and to canvass opinion on potential improvements to the service, such as, Saturday morning opening and the potential for alternative community access points across the district.

The handling of service enquiries through these means has resulted in good standard of customer satisfaction, has improved the efficiency of enquiry handling and has released the capacity of technical and professional officers within the service to concentrate on service performance.

36 The Council has a good and informative web-site. It is well designed, easy to navigate and its functionality is above average. It was ranked 131 out of 464 on a recent survey of local and central government websites carried out by SiteMorse and above average ('content plus') by SOCITM. The site contains up-to-date planning, waste and environmental protection documents and policies, although some document links are difficult to access. Aspects of the development control service can be accessed on line with the opportunity to download application forms electronically and view the weekly list of planning applications received by the Council. However, it is not yet possible to routinely view the detail of planning applications online. Currently, only around 50 per cent of households within the district have access to the internet and the Council is addressing the needs of those residents without personal access, by promoting access to services through libraries.

37 Access to advice and information about the services by residents and users via other means is of a mixed quality. Some service leaflets were available in the Council offices, such as the leaflets on energy efficiency and recycling, and these were aimed at service customers and clear and easy to follow. However, there is currently little published planning guidance and the leaflets that are available are lengthy and not written in plain English. The limited number of leaflets limits the ability of customers to help themselves and to have a full understanding of policy implications or design guidance before they contact the Council with development enquiries.

- 38 The service is responsive to the requirements of local communities and reviews its policy requirements in the light of local need. The Council reviewed its policy to provide a play area as part of a development at Cowpersgate, Long Sutton in favour of a sensory nature garden, based on the fact that the majority of new inhabitants of the houses were households without children. As a result, local residents are proud of the site, it is well used by local residents and it is now completely maintained by local residents.
- 39 However, the service has not fully developed ways to engage with users to ensure that services are designed to meet their needs.
- There are no user forums and no ongoing user expectation surveys in place across the whole of the service to capture customer views.
 - There is limited evidence of service improvements being introduced in response to the findings of planning and environmental surveys of customer satisfaction and service complaints, although the level of complaints is low.
 - No research has been carried out to identify the barriers that prevent residents using services: for example, the Council has not investigated why some residents do not use the recycling service.
 - The Council has only just started (in May 2006) to allow the public to speak at its Development Committee.

This limits the ability of the Council to tailor services to the public's needs.

- 40 The level of customer care provided by the service is generally good. Staff working in the customer contact centre have been through an extensive training programme to provide them with customer care skills and help them respond to customer needs, although recent staff shortages have lengthened waiting times for customers.
- 41 Generic and specific customer service standards are in place and publicised so that customers know what level of service and waiting times for responses to their enquiries and service requests to expect. For example, the target times for action for complaints concerning street cleaning or remedial collection of missed bins. However, the Council does not publish statistics on service performance against these targets or provide the public with details of remedial action or service improvement taken to address complaints.

Diversity

- 42 The Council is proactively working to meet the diverse needs of residents and service users, including those with special needs, such as older people, young people, people with disabilities, residents for whom the first language is not English and people who live in the remote geographical parts of the district.

43 The Council has taken a number of steps to ensure that a wide range of residents and service users have good access to the service.

- The customer contact centre is on the ground floor and has level access to the street with automatic doors. A lift provides access to the other floors of the Council buildings and the circulation space and interview 'pads' are spacious to allow easy passage for customers in wheelchairs or with pushchairs.
- Changes have been made to the layout of the customer contact centre in response to customer feedback. Alterations to the layout were made in response to feedback from a customer with visual impairments and to provide a more enclosed, and protected, space for customers supervising young children.
- The 2004/05 performance data for access to Council buildings for people with disabilities put South Holland above average when compared to similar councils nationally.
- The website provides a voice facility and access to large print alternatives for people with visual impairments and learning difficulties.
- Customer access points are being trialled to bring services out into the more remote rural communities. There is an access point in Long Sutton Market House and a customer services officer is present in Lincolnshire's mobile police van when it is in the district. The take up of these services is low and the Council will assess the impact before making a firm decision on the future of these services.
- The customer contact centre has a facility for 'three way conversations' so that customers whose first language is not English can use a translation service.
- New Council leaflets advertise the translation facilities in the key languages of non-English speaking communities in the district.

This has resulted in enhanced access to the services for a wider range of community groups although the Council has not undertaken any specific research on non-users of the service to identify any potential barriers to service take up.

44 The Council has delivered equalities and diversity training for staff and had a policy on Race Equality which was assessed to meet the equivalent of CRE Level 1. It has recently replaced this with a Generic Equality Scheme (February 2006). This has resulted in a raised awareness amongst staff of the potential needs of diverse community groups but it is too early to assess the impact of this.

- 45 The Council has a clear understanding of the changing nature of its local community. It responded to the increasing number of migrant workers by becoming a key sponsor in a research project into the 'characteristics and needs of migrant workers in South Lincolnshire'. This is partially funded by South Holland District Council, Lincolnshire Enterprise, East Midlands Development Agency and Boston District Council. It has identified that the key languages spoken within the current migrant worker community in the district are: Russian, Polish, Portuguese and Chinese. As a result, all recent Council leaflets include text in these languages. It is currently too early to assess the impact of this work as the project has another eleven months to run. However, locating the project officer in the Council offices has helped service staff understand the characteristics and needs of migrant workers. This is beginning to result in the tailoring of service outputs. For example, the project officer has translated the recycling literature to target it at migrant workers. This is now planned to be distributed in their workplaces with the aim of increasing the participation rate of migrant communities in the recycling scheme.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 46 The Council is successful in delivering an improved environment and user outcomes from the environment service are generally good but performance against key indicators for the service are mixed.
- 47 The published performance indicators are given in the table overleaf.

Indicator	Result 2002/03 and 25 per cent position	Result 2003/04 and 25 per cent position	Result 2004/05 and 25 per cent position	Un-audited figures for 2005/06
Waste and street cleaning				
BVPI 82a and b Percentage of household waste recycled or composted	15% **	15% ***	16% *	21%
BVPI 90b Resident satisfaction with recycling facilities (adjusted for deprivation)	Not collected	72% ***	Not collected	Not collected
BVPI 84 Kg of waste collected per head	386 ***	396 ***	400 ***	370
BVPI 86 Cost of waste collection per household	£37.53 **	£36.97 ***	£39.09 ***	£48.33
BVPI 90a Resident satisfaction with waste collection	Not collected	90% ****	Not collected	Not collected
BVPI 199 Percentage of land significantly littered	New	New	5%	Amended
BVPI 89 Resident satisfaction with standards of cleanliness	Not collected	75% ****	Not collected	Not collected
Environmental health				
BVPI 166a Score against a checklist of environmental health best practice	38 *	55 *	77 *	98

	Result 2002/03 and 25 per cent position	Result 2003/04 and 25 per cent position	Result 2004/05 and 25 per cent position	Un audited figures for 2005/06
Planning				
BVPI109a Percentage of major applications determined within 13 weeks	41 ***	45 ***	60 ***	70
BVPI 109b Percentage of minor applications determined within 8 weeks	35 *	45 *	70 ***	83
BVPI 109c Percentage of other applications determined within 8 weeks	62 *	62 *	86 ***	93
BVPI 111 Percentage of applicants satisfied with the service received	Next survey 2003/04	74 ***	Next survey 2006/07	Next survey 2006/07
BVPI 205 Quality of service checklist for planning	New	New	67 *	78
BVPI 106 Percentage of new homes built on previously developed land	25% *	22% *	34% *	50%
Percentage of derelict brownfield land	-	-	54 *	
Council housing				
BVPI 63 Energy efficiency of council dwellings (SAP)	69 ****	-	70 ****	

*Note comparison is with all relevant councils in England. Key to 25 per cent positions is as follows: * = worst 25 per cent; ** = third 25 per cent; *** = second 25 per cent; **** = best 25 per cent.*

- 48 Just under two thirds of the performance indicators for the service are above average. The Council's indicators for waste and street cleaning are mixed with the amount of waste collected and public satisfaction with these areas of the service being above average, whereas performance in terms of the amount of waste recycled is amongst the worst performing councils. The majority of performance indicators for planning are above average as is the Council's energy efficiency of its housing stock, although performance on the planning checklist is currently amongst the worst performing councils.

Planning

- 49 The Council has a clear understanding of the need to balance economic, social and environmental issues to ensure the sustainable development of the district. It is clear on its priorities around balancing economic diversification with sustainable growth and has clear policies around environmental protection, bio-diversity, green transport, energy efficiency and flood alleviation and risk minimisation. Separate research and policies have been formulated around land use issues associated with travelling communities and it is planned to include this within the Local Plan framework when the opportunity arises.
- 50 The local plan shares the same vision as the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan, providing a policy framework to implement them. It shows an understanding of the needs of the local communities and the pressures facing the district and is clear on what types of development would be welcome, for example, alternative energy solutions that are appropriate to the district. National and regional priorities are reflected in the local plan which addresses the provisions of the 2004 Government Rural Strategy and the needs of minority communities.
- 51 The plan contains policies to deliver a mix of housing types including affordable housing (as a Council and Community priority) and sites for travellers. There is a shortage of affordable housing in the area with the Housing Needs Survey in 2003 showing a net shortfall of 217 affordable homes a year. The Council has an aim to deliver a third of all new housing schemes as affordable housing and the local plan provides for a total of 7,600 new dwellings between 2001 and 2021 with current commitments to deliver 3,800 of these. The plan does not currently include robust coverage of the land-use issues around housing the communities of migrant workers, or the Council's role in designing out crime to contribute to its mission of 'providing a safe, secure place to live'.
- 52 The Council is successful in protecting and enhancing the environment. It has delivered outcomes which have integrated economic, environmental and social issues in a consistent way.
- Staff from building control, planning, environmental protection and economic development work closely together with developers of key sites. A 'development team' approach is used to assist potential developers of major schemes with co-ordinated pre-application advice.
 - As part of a scheme to provide a new community hospital in Spalding, the Primary Care Trust has been required to design an energy efficient building which will both minimise CO2 emissions and the visual impact of the development on the locality.

- As part of an application to locate a factory outlet shopping centre on the fringe of the town centre in Spalding at Springfields, an assessment was made of the likely impact this would have on existing retail units and a S106 agreement required that the new centre was linked to the town by good public transport alternatives. One aspect of this was to investigate the viability of a water taxi route between the two sites on the River Welland. The route of an existing bus service was diverted to stop at the new facility and link it to the town centre and an electric water taxi link was established too. As a result, there has been no noticeable loss of trade to town shops and the water taxi link is well used by local people and has become a tourist attraction for the town.

- 53 The service has made positive use of S106 agreements to secure developer contributions in line with corporate priorities and to deliver infrastructure and environmental improvements, such as community facilities, landscaped areas, green travel plans.

Waste management

- 54 Recycling is collected every week, but the Council has not achieved its recycling target in 2005/06 (according to un-audited figures). It has stabilised the amount of waste collected per household over the last three years and its performance is above average but it has not yet achieved its overall targets to satisfy the Government's strategic agenda in terms of waste minimisation and reducing waste to landfill. The Council's policy is to encourage individual responsibility for waste generation and, as such, it promotes and encourages the home composting of green waste rather than providing a free kerbside collection.

Street cleaning and open space

- 55 The streets and other public spaces are maintained to a high standard. Litter and fly-tipping hotspots are identified and frequently inspected so that they are cleaned as soon as issues arise. The maintenance of open space, such as grass cutting is co-ordinated with litter picking. As a result, the street scene and open space in the district is clean and well-maintained and there are very few complaints. Public satisfaction with the cleanliness of the area is amongst the highest when compared to other councils.
- 56 The Council works with residents to manages the open space well. It is an enabler, offering grant aid to help finance 'Britain in Bloom'. Through this the settlements of Holbeach, Long Sutton, Spalding and Crowland have achieved continuous success in winning awards in this scheme. Similarly, the Council has won an award for the Peace Garden at Ayscoughfee Hall.

- 57 The service is proactive in encouraging the protection of the natural environment and encouraging bio-diversity within the district. For example, it:
- manages the Vernatts Local Nature Reserve in Spalding and has been successful in using this facility for educational days, so that local people are more informed on bio-diversity and nature conservation issues;
 - is a funding partner, and plays an active part, in the Wash Estuary Management Group, which has the remit of protecting the distinctive environment of this national site of special scientific interest. The Council, in association with its partners has been successful in a range of initiatives to this end. This includes: raising local awareness and encouraging the sustainable management of the impacts of local activities such as farming, recreational activities and fishing; strengthening the economic viability of certain local industries with the introduction of local brands, such as 'Saltmarsh Beef' and managing the conflicts between certain activities, such as farming and recreational use;
 - has undertaken a 'Strategic Landscape Character and Capacity Study' as a basis for identifying which areas of the district have the capacity to accommodate certain types of development. This has provided a sound basis for Local Plan policy as well as providing a firm basis for planning decisions, for example, the application for a wind farm at Gedney Marsh which was approved by the Council based on the findings of this research which found that the local landscape in the vicinity of the site had adequate capacity to absorb this development; and
 - has led on the delivery of an EU Leader funded project, Curlew, to develop nature conservation skills within the community. The project resulted in 832 people being trained in nature conservation skills within the community and 20 bio-diversity projects (many of which were nature conservation sites) being set up across the district.

Environmental protection

- 58 The Council is proactive in assessing the impact of climate change and flooding on the local area. It has carried out considerable work within the service to assess the local risks of river and coastal flooding and the impact of flood prevention schemes. One of the senior managers within the service is part of a national ODPM working group with the remit of developing good practice guidance on minimising flood risk as a basis for new planning policy (Planning Policy Statement 25). This work provides a clear basis for monitoring the impact of climate change on the local environment, providing a robust policy framework upon which to base planning decisions and to protect local people, buildings and businesses from flooding.

Environmental sustainability

- 59 The Council is encouraging joined up working between all Council service areas to deliver the community priority of 'Sustainable Communities'. It has formed a matrix working group to lead on the delivery of this priority, which is chaired from within the planning service, and includes representatives from all frontline service areas. This group has been meeting for about a year and its initial impact has been to align strategic plans (such as the corporate plan and community strategy) and service plan documents around this theme.
- 60 The Council has made piecemeal efforts to minimise the environmental impacts of its own operation within the service area or corporately but these are ad hoc and not carried out as part of a systematic approach. It does not have an accredited environmental management scheme but has made some attempts to reduce the impact of its environmental performance. For example, it has:
- reduced the amount of harmful chemicals that it uses as part of its cleaning services;
 - found alternatives to the use of peat for its grounds maintenance services;
 - improved the energy efficiency of its council housing (best quartile);
 - reduced its own energy consumption and costs, through initiatives such as the introduction of activity sensor-based lighting within its offices, so that lights automatically turn off when no physical activity is picked up within the room by the sensor; and
 - reduced the amount of office waste it produces and increased the amount of recycling by introducing a restricted waste bin policy.
- 61 However, the Council does not have a green procurement policy for its services and has not adopted a consistent or holistic approach to minimising the environmental impacts of its operation. As a result, the Council cannot demonstrate to the local community that it consistently leads by example on environmental matters.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 62 The environment service delivers value for money. It is low cost but delivers above average quality and public satisfaction with the service is above average when compared to other councils.
- 63 The cost of the planning service is comparably low with performance and satisfaction above average. The costs of the service have remained reasonably consistent over the last few years with the exception of funding for two new posts and performance on the processing of all types of application was above average for 2004/05. The cost of the waste and recycling service was below average in 2004/05 and public satisfaction is high - satisfaction with waste is amongst the best performing councils and satisfaction with recycling is above average when compared to other councils.

- 64 The service does not robustly investigate the local factors that affect service costs. It has identified that the geographic nature of the district and the dispersed nature of households in the district impact on the costs of some aspects of the service that they provide. For example:
- the wide geographical dispersal of households across the district impacts on the number of refuse/recycling collection rounds, increasing the number of vehicles and crews and the fuel costs of running the service, but the service has not quantified this additional cost; and
 - the Council's policy of improving customer access to its services through the introduction of a customer access point at Long Sutton Market House and in association with the mobile police van, impacts on the cost of this and other Council services. However, the Council has not yet evaluated the cost and benefit of providing these facilities.
- 65 The Council allocates resources in line with its key priority. The waste and street cleaning service is the stated number one priority for the Council and this has been reflected in the allocation of resources to improve the service. The Cabinet took the clear policy decision to use funding released by ceasing pest control and from greater return on investments, to fund the recycling service. In doing so, it targeted investment at those aspects of the service that are its priority.
- 66 There are no clear corporate guidelines or criteria on how value for money should be assessed. Councillors are clear on the criteria by which they judge the value for money of services, although this is not documented. Factors such as public satisfaction, levels of complaints, cost effectiveness, and the quality of service outcomes are used to decide whether services are value for money. For example, a decision was made to bring the waste and street cleaning contract in-house in 2001 to reduce the costs of the service. Similarly, following a large number of complaints, the grounds maintenance contract was terminated in 2004 and brought in-house, to improve the quality of the service. In the absence of specific corporate guidance, service managers have adopted different approaches within their individual service areas. Some managers have identified unit costs of aspects of the service but, given the lack of service participation in external cost, process and quality benchmarking activity, there is no evidence to show how this information has been used to inform service improvements. As a result, officers within the service do not have a consistent or well developed approach to assessing the value for money of the services they provide.

67 The Council's approach to improving value for money is not robust. There are some good examples of activities that have led to improvements, but there is no systematic approach. For example:

- the waste service has introduced a number of efficiencies which have resulted in the number of collection rounds being reduced from nine to eight, which has allowed the introduction of weekly, rather than fortnightly, recycling collections. This has both improved the service to local people and also increased the amount of recycling collected; and
- the open space and gardens service reacted to below average satisfaction levels (in 2004/05) by changing the contract arrangements and recent anecdotal evidence suggest that satisfaction is now significantly higher.

This means that although managers identify ad hoc improvements in the value for money of the service, they do not have a clear focus on how this can be systematically improved.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 68** The Council has implemented changes to the service which have delivered better outcomes for users, although some of these have been ad hoc and not always part of a planned improvement agenda. Service performance over the last three years demonstrates a general trend of improvement, although this is from a comparatively low base for parts of the service.
- 69** The Council has introduced a number of improvements to the service over the last three years. These include:
- streamlined planning processes, in response to being designated a planning standards authority in 2004/05. The service has improved its planning processes and has enhanced its staffing structure to improve service efficiency, which means that planning applicants are receiving a better service;
 - introduction of the customer services centre as the first point of contact for service enquiries in 2004; improved coverage and functions of the website, between 2004 and the present day, for example, with the introduction of a speech facility and new online planning services. This has made service information easier to access for local people;
 - bringing the street cleaning and open space maintenance work back in-house in response to a high level of public complaints. This allowed integrated working and co-ordinated activity on litter picking and grass cutting which has resulted in a much improved service with few complaints, at a lower cost;
 - increasing recycling rounds from fortnightly to weekly collections so that local people have a more frequent service; and
 - implementing the recommendations from the earlier Audit Commission inspection of its waste services.
- 70** The service has delivered an improving level of service as reflected in national performance indicators over the last three years, although some of these indicators have improved from a comparably low base. Service indicators that have improved over this period include the following.
- Planning performance, which has improved from being amongst the worst performing councils in 2002/03 to above average in 2004/05. Un-audited figures show that the Council will exceed the Government targets for each category of application in 2005/06.
 - Recycling performance has improved over the last three years, from 15 per cent of waste being recycled in 2003/04 to 21 per cent in 2005/06 (un-audited figures) and the availability of the service increasing from 86 per cent in 2002/03 to 98 per cent in 2005/06, according to the un-audited figures.

- The weight of waste collected has remained fairly stable over the past three years, showing some progress towards the waste minimisation agenda.
- The cost of the waste service has improved from being above average cost to below average cost in 2004/05. Costs have risen for 2005/06 (un-audited figures) but this reflects recent investment in the service with the introduction of weekly recycling collections.

71 However:

- The recycling performance (at 21 per cent according to unaudited figures) is likely to miss the Government's target of 24 per cent.

How well does the service manage performance?

72 There is a clear framework of plans to guide service delivery backed up by a performance management system and performance is managed. However, the future of the service is not fully explained in current plans, measurable objectives, and targets. Resources needed are not routinely identified for all service areas so it is unclear when, or how, some actions will be delivered.

Future plans

73 There is a clear thread showing how corporate and service strategies address the national and regional agenda. Both the community plan and corporate plans have recently been revised to ensure that they concur with the county-wide Community Strategy and cover the same timeframe (A Sustainable Community Strategy for Lincolnshire 2006/09, produced by the Lincolnshire Assembly). The service has produced a matrix to map how corporate plans and service strategies reflect and deliver national and regional priorities. This makes the linkages clear and also ensures that the service is delivering against the national and regional agendas.

74 Councillors are clear about their vision for future service delivery and this is understood by officers, but it is not documented and, for example, is not transparent in the corporate plan. The Council's vision is, in part, supported by service strategies and plans, such as the Local Plan and Recycling Strategy and also by service business plans. These are based on an understanding of the challenges and opportunities the area faces but the Recycling Strategy only has a two-year time horizon with aims that are focused on the short to medium-term and no Council targets beyond 2005/06. There are no current plans which clearly set out the longer-term vision for service delivery or the type of service that the environment service will be in the future. As a result, local people will not be clear on the way the service is developing for the future.

- 75 The Council is committed to ensuring that it has a clear planning policy framework in place that reflects the spatial aims of the Community Plan. It is awaiting the outcome of the Planning Inspectorate's Decision on the Draft Re-Deposit Local Plan which is timetabled for adoption by summer 2006. This draft plan was delayed to ensure that it took account of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy as well as to include the result of research into flood risk assessment and sustainable energy alternatives. The Council is responding to the changes in the planning system and has an agreed local development scheme, although this will need to change to reflect the later than planned adoption of the local plan. A Statement of Community Involvement has been submitted to the Government office and is awaiting approval. This means that the Council has a clear policy framework to guide the delivery of its corporate and community priorities for the future.
- 76 The Council is beginning to assess its service delivery to ensure the equality of provision. For example, the new generic equality scheme provides for all service plans to be reviewed this year to assess the impacts of diversity issues and to eliminate potential discrimination in all policy and service areas. This is to be implemented by September 2006 and will be monitored quarterly. It also has plans to develop an Organisational Development Strategy and human resource strategy but no decision has yet been made on the timetable to do this. As a result, it is too early to assess any tangible impact from these initiatives.

Performance management

- 77 The Council has a performance management framework and service performance is managed. However, the way in which this is done is not transparent in the absence of measurable objectives and targets for some areas of service activity, and the resources required to implement actions are not routinely assessed.
- 78 Day-to-day performance is managed through regular team meetings and one-to-one meetings with staff, but there is no transparent reporting of actions against the overall service business plan. The Council has identified a basket of corporate health indicators using principles of a balanced scorecard to focus on the key strategic issues for the authority. These are monitored quarterly by senior managers and members, who are clear about their role in performance management, and used to ensure that service delivery is on track. The reports on key indicators include information on those national and local performance indicators where performance is below target. The reports on performance give managers and councillors a regular, up-to-date picture of performance which allows them to focus on what matters but it is not clear how this information is used or how poor or under performance is addressed.
- 79 A specific improvement plan has been produced for planning, to improve performance and the quality of the service to customers and this is being regularly monitored. Under-performance is being challenged by the service manager on a weekly basis and addressed. The close monitoring of the service has resulted in a significant upturn in performance for this aspect of the service over the last two years.

- 80 The performance management framework is not transparent as there is a lack of measurable objectives for parts of the service. Service plans set out timescales and responsibilities but do not identify clear measurable targets or resource requirements, such as the person days allocated to complete a task, for teams or individuals. As resource requirements to deliver actions are not routinely assessed or planned, it is unclear how managers assess that they have sufficient resources to deliver the service plans to timetable. Similarly, as measurable objectives are not routinely set for the service, it is unclear how the Council will know what contribution the service has made to the delivery of corporate priorities or when the relative outcome has been achieved.
- 81 Staff are aware of the part they play in delivering corporate priorities and the staff appraisal process is embedded throughout the environment service. There is a link between corporate plans, service business plans, and individual staff plans. Actions in team and individual work plans are linked directly to corporate and community plan priorities. The appraisal process is conducted through twice-yearly personal development reviews (PDRs) with all office-based staff. It is valued by staff, helping them to see how they contribute to delivering the Council's objectives and providing them with personal development opportunities.
- 82 There is a record of sound financial management with resources directed towards priority areas. For example:
- there is online access to current budget information and service managers and portfolio holders receive monthly budget summary showing variances against profile;
 - developer contributions from section 106 agreements are targeted at delivering corporate priorities such as affordable housing and are effectively monitored and implemented; and
 - funding was directed towards the Council's key priority of waste to develop the recycling service.

This allows the service to manage its budgets efficiently and to be in a position to address any variations or overspends at an early stage.

Learning

- 83 The service is open to external challenge. The whole Council invited external assessors to challenge it using the EFQM model and the service invited challenge on the self-assessment for this inspection. Some sections use external assessment to identify best practice, such as the peer review used by environmental protection to assess current performance, identify areas for improvement, and to identify best practice. But this is not widespread across the whole environment service. The results of the external challenge are used to inform improvements, for example, an improvement plan was drawn up to address issues raised in the environmental protection audit.

- 84 A variety of ways are used to identify service improvement. In addition, to external challenge, the service engages staff in identifying potential improvements in service delivery, and uses team meetings to review performance and discuss issues around service delivery. Service staff are encouraged to make suggestions for improvement using, for example, the incentive based corporate staff suggestion scheme 'Better Business at South Holland'. As a result, service staff feel empowered to make suggestions for service improvement.
- 85 The service does not currently take advantage of the opportunity to systematically learn from its experiences or user feedback. It is not proactively engaged in external benchmarking across all areas to inform service improvements and value for money. The service does not routinely seek feedback in all areas, or use the feedback it has from customer satisfaction surveys and the corporate compliments/feedback/complaints system to inform its service delivery or service improvements. This inhibits the service's ability to deliver ongoing improvements to service delivery and value for money.
- 86 Corporate Council staff are involved as assessors with 'Midlands Excellence', a private sector focused improvement organisation although, as yet, there is no evidence to show how learning from this activity has helped inform improvements.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 87 The service has the capacity to improve. Training and development is provided to all officers and councillors, and both are clear on their roles. Key strategies are in place to guide resource allocation, such as the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Procurement Strategy. The Council is active in local partnerships and can demonstrate outcomes from them, although it does not currently assess the cost-effectiveness of its partnership working. Neither does it currently have a fully effective HR framework in place, although this is planned.
- 88 The service has the people, skills and capability it needs to deliver its priorities. It has addressed the difficulties in recruitment and retention in a variety of ways such as, re-skilling staff from other parts of the organisation, sponsoring students through university with on the job training, and employing trainees. This helps the service ensure that it has the necessary capacity to deliver.
- 89 The Council currently lacks a fully effective HR framework. It acknowledges that this presents a risk of losing key staff. It is planning to produce an HR framework and a proposal for an organisational development plan is to be presented to cabinet shortly. Some aspects of succession planning have been investigated and a senior manager development programme is in place. The Council routinely seeks feedback from staff to assess job satisfaction, which is high and has increased between 2004 and 2005. However, the survey expressed some concern over excessive workloads and it is not clear how this is being addressed. Sickness absence levels across the Council are higher than the national average and the Council's own targets. The lack of a clear framework makes it hard for the Council to address these issues in the round and leaves it at risk of reduced capacity with the consequent inability to deliver the services effectively.

- 90 Training and development is well planned for both officers and councillors. Staff training plans are developed during their personal development review (PDR) interviews and cover both technical training and corporate topics. There is a Councillor programme for training and essential training is given for councillors sitting on relevant committees, for example councillors on the Development Committee receive training on planning matters.
- 91 Councillors and officers are clear about their respective roles and the boundaries between them. There is a clear protocol covering the relative roles of officers and councillors and it includes protocols on the extent of the relationship between officers and councillors. This is clearly understood by senior councillors, managers and staff. There is a separate protocol for the planning service which is understood by those involved in the planning service and is used as the basis for Councillor training in planning.
- 92 The Council has a medium-term financial plan which is basically sound but does not meet all good practice guidance. It is only updated every two years and even though it projects the five-year budget, it does not explain the funding breakdown or include all income streams. The Council has actions to address this as part of its Use of Resources action plan. There are adequate resources to deliver the service but it is not clear how the Council allocates resources against priorities for the service.
- 93 There is good working across administrative boundaries. The Council works well with neighbouring authorities and partners to deliver effective outcomes for the wider community. For example, there is currently joint working between the Lincolnshire Authorities on waste and planning issues and the service plays an active role in developing the regional planning agenda. Historically, there was joint working across Government Office boundaries to deliver shared agendas. For example, the Peterborough Cell was a partnership project to bring regional recycling to the area. Closely aligned to the Cambridgeshire environmental trust operated by Shanks and McEwan, it has provided significant investment to improve the recycling service.
- 94 The Council's ICT provision is restricting the service's ability to deliver services effectively and access by external users. Although the web-site is user-friendly, it is not always possible to access and open documents remotely. The limited Broadband capacity currently impedes internal access at times and some users do not have access to appropriate systems, resulting in less efficient working processes although the Council has plans to address this.
- 95 The Council has a new procurement strategy, which reflects good practice but managers within the service do not understand what constitutes procurement. The strategy is lengthy, not written in plain English and is not used proactively within the service to direct procurement activity. For example, legal services are engaged in an ad-hoc way without considering whether this is the most efficient procurement route. Training on procurement has not been provided for those staff who may need to procure goods or services; neither is it planned. There is, however, a corporate procurement resource for guidance if needed. Therefore the Council does not know if it is achieving greatest benefit for the public purse.

- 96** The Council is engaged in several strategic partnerships and can point to evidence of improvements in services. For example, working with the Wash Estuary Strategy Group the Council has identified that it has achieved benefit to the value of around six times its contribution. However, the Council does not routinely evaluate the cost/benefits of its partnership activity and the contribution to the delivery of corporate priorities. As a result, the Council does not know if it is achieving value for money from its partnership activity.