

Service Inspection Report

July 2006



Environment Inspection

Mansfield 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 (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.

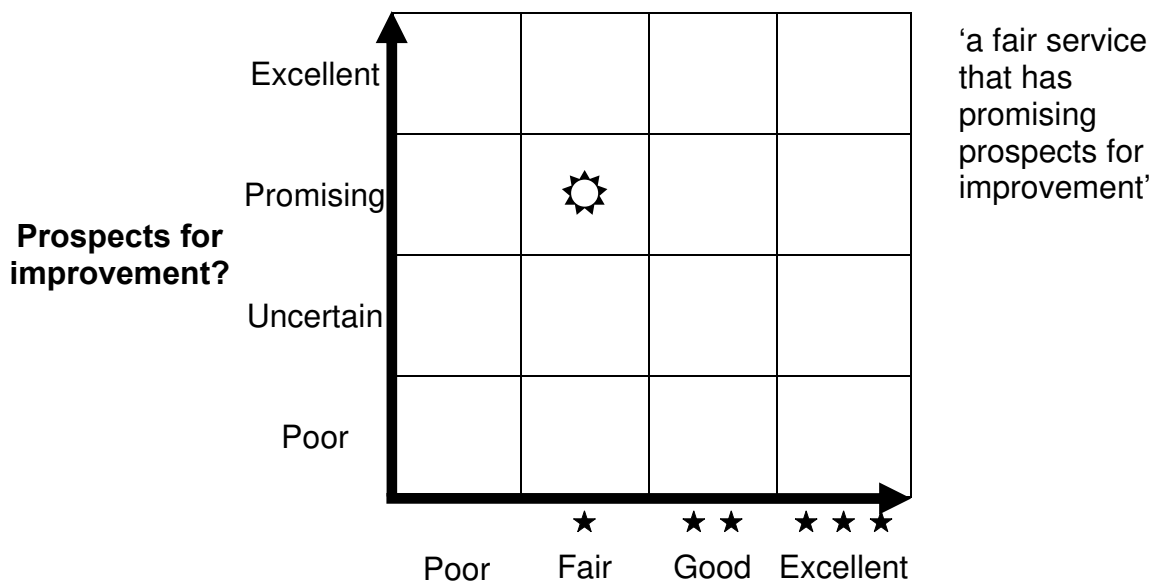
Summary

- 1 Mansfield District is a largely compact urban area in North Nottinghamshire with a population of just over 98,700 with only four per cent from black and minority ethnic groups. The district has changed considerably over the past 20 years and it is finally overcoming the legacy of social economic and environmental problems as a result of the loss of coal mining and textile industries. However, the area is still the 33rd most deprived of 354 local authorities nationally. Levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and vandalism are comparatively high.
- 2 The Council's waste, parks and streetcare service are largely responsible for the delivery of the Council's priority of 'developing a high quality clean and pleasant environment'. It also contributes to the delivery of three of the remaining four Council priorities; reducing crime and disorder; revitalise our district town centres and neighbourhoods; and ensure effective leadership and management.
- 3 The purpose of the inspection was to establish how effectively the service contributes to the protection and enhancement of both Mansfield's environment and the wider environment. The scope included waste collection and recycling; street cleansing; enforcement and management of urban open spaces but excluded the management of the Council's formal parks, nature reserves and cemetery service. The service is one of the Council's most important public facing services employing 96 people and with a budget of £3.6 million in 2005/06.
- 4 Overall, the Council's waste, parks and streetcare service is 'fair'. The service is in transition; 2004/05 comparative performance is poor, but steady improvement in performance was delivered in all service areas in 2005/06. The local environment is improving; most areas in the district, but not all, are clean and more waste is being recycled. The service is responsive with a balanced approach to education and enforcement and has developed a good approach to consultation, equality and diversity. Accessing the service via the telephone is good but this it is not the case for out-of-hours contacts, obtaining services via the Council's website and accessing the local County Council civic amenity site. Overall services are not particularly value for money and almost all services are delivered in-house. The Council does not yet have a systematic way of reducing the use of its own resources or assessing the impact on the environment.
- 5 There are promising prospects for improvement in the service. Plans address most current weaknesses, the concerns of local people, and wider environmental aims. The service is developing a good track record of improvement with cleaner streets and improved recycling performance. The service is well resourced and service capacity is increasing through more flexible HR policies and a reduction in sickness. However, there is no detailed medium term financial model for the service and there are some risks and challenges to manage in the near future. Performance management is improving, but a focus on value for money and effective challenge for the service are under-developed.

Scoring the service

- 6 We have assessed Mansfield District Council as providing a 'fair', one-star 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



A good service?

Source: Audit Commission

- 7 The service is a fair one-star service because:
- the waste/recycling collection service is reliable and most households are served by a kerbside recycling scheme;
 - the street cleansing service is responsive, fly tips, abandoned cars and graffiti are removed quickly;
 - the Council has developed a balanced approach to education and enforcement on environmental issues; and
 - the Council is developing a robust approach to consultation, equality and diversity and is generally responsive to the needs of citizens in designing service improvements.

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.

However:

- the Council has been behind others in recycling waste and minimising the amount it collects although this has recently improved;
- most areas in the district are clean but some areas still fall below acceptable standards; dog fouling is still an issue for local people;
- overall satisfaction with services has been comparatively low in national surveys;
- there is poor access for out-of-hours contacts, via the Council's website and via the County Council civic amenity site located in the district;
- the Council does not yet have a systematic way of reducing the use of its own resources or assessing the impact on the environment; and
- overall the service is not especially value for money. There has been no exploration of alternative methods of service delivery. The Council does not know to what extent contextual issues impact on the service.

8 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has plans for improvement that aim to improve the service and address most current weaknesses, the concerns of local people, and wider environmental aims;
- the service is developing a good track record of improvement. The district is getting cleaner with less litter and less graffiti. Successful changes to the waste service have resulted in improved recycling performance and less waste to landfill;
- the service is well resourced and service capacity is increasing through more flexible HR policies and a reduction in sickness;
- the use of new technology, procurement and partnerships to increase capacity is developing; and
- there is a good track record of securing external funding and the Council is well placed to attract future funding.

9 However:

- there is no detailed medium term financial model for the service and there are some risks and challenges to manage in the near future;
- performance in key indicators has lagged behind that of others; and
- performance management is improving, but a focus on value for money and effective challenge for the service are under-developed.

Recommendations

- 10 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate 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 Continue to shape service delivery around need – for example by:

- *clarifying the Council's approach to out-of-hours contacts;*
- *matching operating hours to when the service will have most impact;*
- *improving access to the civic amenity site through effective partnership working with the county Council; and*
- *improving the environment content of the Council's website to address current weaknesses in content and navigation.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a more responsive service; greater visibility and better targeted;
- a more co-ordinated approach with partners to support the national waste agenda;
- less telephone contacts as customers are able to gain information from the website; and
- improving levels of satisfaction.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by April 2008.

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 Demonstrate and improve value for money in the service by:

- *conducting productivity/quality reviews to establish how efficient the current operation is and where improvements or further investments are needed;*
- *using technology and business process re-engineering to reduce administration and overhead costs;*
- *review the financial management arrangements in the service to make the best use of corporate capacity and remove unnecessary administration; and*
- *using benchmarking data – including HR and unit costs to challenge the current service and identify how competitive the service is.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- more efficient services and reduced costs;
- improved challenge and more rapid deployment of new methods and technology to improve services; and
- the development of a mechanism to ensure ongoing competitiveness that does not require unnecessary investment in traditional market testing.

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

Recommendation

R3 Ensure the financial sustainability in the service by:

- *developing a medium term financial model for the service to identify future operational/capital costs; and*
- *identify options and contingencies for risks and costs that are sensitive to market forces such as energy and transport.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater clarity of the financial impact of changes to new recycling services, new disposal routes and treatment methods on the future costs of the waste service;
- an exit strategy for sustained performance in parts of the service which currently benefits from NRF and other external funding; and
- improved budgeting and opportunity for challenging current arrangements.

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

Report context

The locality

- 11 Situated in the heart of Nottinghamshire in the East Midlands, Mansfield is a largely compact urban area covering 77 square kilometres. The Council's administrative area includes the town itself together with the smaller communities of Warsop and Mansfield Woodhouse. Whilst there are over 600 acres of parks and open spaces in the District it is the largest urban area in Nottinghamshire outside Nottingham city.
- 12 The area has a population of just over 98,700 people with only four per cent from black and ethnic minority groups. This compares with 9 per cent regionally and 13 per cent nationally (2004 census). The population has reduced by 1 per cent between 1982 and 2002, in contrast with the East Midlands region which saw an overall population increase of 10 per cent in the same period. The under 15 and over 65 population is above average when compared locally and nationally.
- 13 The district of Mansfield has changed considerably over the past 20 years. The decline of the coal mining and textile industries in the 1980s created high unemployment and a legacy of social problems inherent in rapid industrial decline as well as environmental damage and pollution. Regeneration programmes since then has resulted in new jobs to the area, improvements to the built environment especially the town centre, the re-establishment of railway links to Nottingham and the re-opening of the railway station. The town centre has an active economy by day with an established outdoor market and also serves as a regional centre for night time leisure activities especially for young people.
- 14 Although the overall level of deprivation in the district level has improved from 29th to 33rd (out of 354 local authorities in England) on the national index of deprivation, deprivation is still very high. Forty-three per cent of the population live in the 10 per cent most deprived areas nationally. The area still has some poor quality, low demand housing, low educational attainment and comparatively low average weekly wage levels; £258 - well below the regional average of £334. There are high levels of crime; anti-social behaviour and vandalism are acknowledged issues locally.

The Council

- 15 Mansfield is one of only a few district councils with an elected mayor. The Council had up to 2003 traditionally been Labour controlled with the party occupying at one time as many as 45 of the 46 council seats. The May 2003 elections resulted in a change of political control. Currently there are 28 independent councillors, 13 Labour, 4 Liberal Democrats and 1 Conservative. The mayor has appointed a cross-party cabinet of himself and 5 Independent portfolio holders and a Liberal Democrat deputy mayor all with some delegated powers. Three select commissions perform the scrutiny function with a remit to develop policy through undertaking investigations and to scrutinise decisions.

- 16 The Council has also established five area assemblies across the district whose functions are to encourage self-help, to act as a channel for local views and to make recommendations to the Council to improve service delivery. Limited funding (£8,000) is devolved to the assemblies to make community grants.
- 17 The Council's organisational structure has been subject to many changes over the past three years. A managing director was appointed in October 2005 and since then the Council has undertaken to restructure the management team. Recruitment is underway for two new director posts which together with the head of policy and research will form the strategic management team. The new structure reduces the number of direct reports to the managing director from 14 to six and also reduces the number of heads of service from nine to seven. Appointment to heads of service will take place in June 2006.
- 18 The Council employs 1,210 staff and has a net revenue budget of £14.7 million in 2005/06. Although net reserves in March 2005 were £2.8 million, there are continuing pressures on finances in the medium-term as there is a projected budget gap of around £0.4 million.
- 19 Council finances are affected by the nature of the area. Comparatively low property values are reflected in the council tax banding which results in low funding for the Council. However, Council spending per person overall is higher than regional and national averages at £149 in 2004/05 compared with £130 regionally and £139 nationally. The overall level of deprivation in the district has qualified the Council for significant external regeneration funding via a number of sources including £3.5 million Liveability funding, £14 million neighbourhood renewal (NRF), single regeneration budget, European and other capital grants.

The Council's waste, parks and streetcare services

- 20 The purpose of the inspection was to establish how effectively the inspected services contribute to the protection and enhancement of both Mansfield's environment and the wider environment.
- 21 The scope of the inspection included waste collection and recycling; street cleansing; enforcement and management of urban open spaces (named the 'service' elsewhere in this report). We did not inspect the management of the Council's formal parks, nature reserves or cemetery service. The service areas inspected are some of the Council's most important public facing services and cover some areas of weakness identified in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) in 2003 which rated the Council overall as 'weak'.
- 22 The service inspected forms part of the Council's direct services organisation and is almost entirely run in-house. It employs 96 people and has a revenue budget in 2006/07 of £3.6 million and has a planned capital spend of £400,000.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 23** The Council and its partners share an overall vision for the area which recognises the scale of the problems the area faces. This is: 'We will create a more positive image of Mansfield district to bring people, businesses and investment in to our area. We will improve confidence pride and dignity so everyone can enjoy a good quality of life in our neighbourhoods.'
- 24** The Council adopted a new corporate plan in October 2005 covering the period to 2015. This was developed through consultation with local people and other stakeholders during 2005 which identified the key issues as deprivation, fear of crime, and dirty streets. These local environmental issues and the quality of life for local residents are reflected in the Council's five new corporate priorities:
- reducing crime and disorder;
 - ensure decent homes for all;
 - revitalise our district town centres and neighbourhoods;
 - develop a high quality clean and pleasant environment; and
 - ensure effective leadership and management.
- 25** The corporate priority for 'develop a clean and pleasant environment' is underpinned by three specific targets which are:
- achieve at least 90 per cent of surveyed land meeting acceptable levels of cleanliness by 2010;
 - increase to 40 per cent reuse and recycling of household waste by 2010; and
 - achieve at least 75 per cent public satisfaction with parks and open spaces by 2007
- and three complimentary goals:
- meet the English Nature target of one hectare of local nature reserve per 1,000 population by 2010;
 - reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from Council buildings by 20 per cent from the 1990 baseline; and
 - work with partners to ensure high quality design in buildings and public spaces.
- 26** The Council's corporate priorities and targets reflect national minimum targets, for example for CO₂ emissions, but do not go beyond it. As specific targets they are narrow and do not express the wider contextual challenges for the environment such as climate change, waste minimisation or reducing levels of pollution. However there is a good understanding of the wider national and regional environmental issues at service level.

A range of aims linked to national, regional, community and corporate strategies have been adopted and integrated into the two key strategies that provide focus for the service; the MDC Waste Management Plan and Litter Plan 2006-10.

- 27** The Council is an active partner in the Nottinghamshire Joint Local Authority Waste Partnership (NJLAWP) and has committed to implement the Nottinghamshire Waste Strategy. This involves:
- implementation of alternate week kerbside collections of household waste and dry recyclables;
 - roll out of kerbside green waste collections supported by a range of bring sites (glass/textiles/shoes) and Household Waste Recycling Centres; and
 - joint county wide promotion of waste minimisation/recycling initiatives eg a subsidised home compost bin scheme and 'Real Nappy' campaign.
- 28** The Council has also signed up to the Nottinghamshire Public Service Agreement stretch targets within the NJLAWP. The Council must therefore achieve the following recycling targets:
- 18 per cent by 2005/06 (National Statutory Performance Standard);
 - 21 per cent 2005/06 (Nottinghamshire Public Service Agreement Stretch Target); and
 - 40 per cent by 2010 (Mansfield District Council Corporate Plan Target).
- 29** The service is actively engaged in other partnerships to deliver on cross cutting issues such as sustainability and community safety. These include:
- The Mansfield Area Strategic Partnership (MASP), the LSP which is currently reviewing its priority targets to align with Mansfield's new corporate priorities;
 - East Midlands - Regional Waste Partnership which amongst other things seeks to achieve a zero growth in waste generated by 2010 and has policies that link planning and waste issues, providing a sustainable plan for construction waste;
 - Nottinghamshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) to work at county level to deliver cleaner and greener public spaces; and
 - Neighbourhood Management Teams - to ensure that NRF funding is targeted at improving outcomes in deprived areas.
- 30** Mansfield's Direct Services is benefiting directly and indirectly from external funding as a result of the high levels of deprivation in the area.
- There are nine Neighbourhood Renewal areas in Mansfield: five since 2001/02 and a further four since 2004. Crime reduction, local environment and education issues were priorities for these areas and as a consequence £300,000 NRF funding was allocated for new neighbourhood wardens in 2005.

14 Environment Inspection | How good is the service?

- In 2004, the Council was awarded £3 million Liveability funding to revitalise the town centre. This resulted in the creation of the town centre (cleansing) operations unit and a major improvement scheme for the town's historic market place.

- 31 The Council has a long tradition of entering and an ambition to win the East Midlands in Bloom competition. This is managed through the services' parks and streetcare service.

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

- 32 The service is in transition; 2004/05 comparative performance is poor, but a steady improvement in performance has been delivered in all service areas in 2005/06. The local environment is improving; most areas in the district, but not all, are clean and more waste is being recycled and more residents have access to a kerbside recycling scheme. The service is responsive with a balanced approach to education and enforcement and has developed a good approach to consultation, equality and diversity. Accessing the service via the telephone is good but this it is not the case for out-of-hours contacts, obtaining services via the Council's website and accessing the local County Council civic amenity site. The Council does not yet have a systematic way of reducing the use of its own resources or assessing the impact on the environment.

Access, customer care and user/or community focus

- 33 The Council has developed a robust approach to consultation with the public and service users on environmental and related issues. Consultation is planned and systematic and uses a range of techniques. These include the citizen's panel, area assemblies, neighbourhood management teams, focus groups, user questionnaires and other methods such as road shows. As a result the Council has been able to engage with all sections of the community including ethnic minorities and young people.
- 34 The service is generally responsive to the needs and priorities of citizens and users and has accounted for these in designing some improvements. There are some positive examples where information from consultation and complaints has resulted in positive action. For example strong support for enforcement action from the public has resulted in new street wardens to help tackle issues such as littering and graffiti. However, the Council has not determined the Council's relative spending priorities for this service and has yet to fully respond to the public's expectation about providing a kerbside glass collection service. The Council cannot therefore be sure of public support for its relative investment in activities such as East Midlands in Bloom.

- 35 Contacting the service to report an issue or obtain advice during normal office hours is good. There is a single telephone contact number which is well publicised and calls are answered promptly. Staff in the contact centre are friendly; user focused and are able to deal with most service queries at the point of contact. Information about service contacts is recorded by contact staff onto a customer relationship management system. This enables a more joined up service to be delivered, for example, through having access to an individual customer contact history or providing contact staff with information on how the service has responded to a reported issue.
- 36 Although the arrangements for most customer telephone contacts are good, there are some weaknesses in the current arrangements. These include the following.
- Out-of-hours arrangements are not clear. For example, customers who telephone outside of normal office hours or at weekends receive an automated message and a number to call for 'emergencies'. The Council has not clearly defined what it means by this and as a consequence customers have to decide for themselves. This means that issues such as litter and fly tips may not be cleared up quickly.
 - Customers are not proactively advised of the response times for dealing with all reported issues or offered a call back to provide an update.
 - Trade waste contacts are not handled by the contact centre. There is a trade waste telephone number and all contacts however simple or complex are handled by an individual officer. In a survey conducted in 2005, 29 per cent of trade customers had used the wrong telephone number to contact the service. Therefore access for trade customers is confusing and unlikely to be of a consistent standard during office opening times.
- 37 External communication by the services is variable which limits its overall effectiveness. Currently there is no corporate standard applied to external communication such as leaflets or the website content and generally it is not tested with users. However, there are pockets of good practice. For example:
- recycling and street cleansing campaigns are generally effective. They make good use of recognisable 'characters' such as the 'blue bin angel' and 'GRIME monster' in leaflets, posters and other marketing materials to sell the Council's message; but
 - access to the service via the Council's website is weak. The contents and navigation of the website is shaped around the Council's organisation which does not necessarily align with user needs. For example, there is no clear information about customer standards under 'Our service standards' on the home page; it contains information about best value and CPA. The use of Council terminology makes using the site difficult for users. For example customers wishing to report a fly tip, graffiti or other litter problem have to find a street cleansing request form amongst 27 other online reporting forms. The website also lacks information about the provision of second refuse bins or the provision of assisted collections.

- 38 The service has a range of customer service standards in place which are published in the annual refuse and recycling booklet to all households and all in the direct services section of the Council's website. Performance against national performance indicators and most local standards is also published. The public are therefore able to see how well the Council is delivering what it promised.
- 39 Access to facilities to enable the public to dispose of waste and litter responsibly is mixed.
- There is a good provision of litter and dog waste bins in the district which are emptied on a frequent basis. This includes weekends and bank holidays for bins located in the town centre.
 - The Council has increased the number of recycling banks in the district to 23 to supplement its kerbside collections of materials such as glass and textiles. The majority of these are clean and tidy and accessible to most sections of the community.
 - Kerbside recycling facilities are widely available; currently 95 per cent of households receive a fortnightly collection of mixed dry recyclable materials. However, only around 10 per cent of households receive a green waste collection service.
 - Access to Mansfield's Civic Amenity site is poor. Although the site is the responsibility of the County Council, it has an impact on the delivery of the Council's priority for a clean and pleasant environment. Partnership working is not resulting in good access to these recycling facilities for local people. There are lengthy queues at most times and the public do not consider some restrictions or operational practice as appropriate. As a consequence the public consider the site does not discourage fly tipping or promotes responsible disposal and recycling of waste.
 - The Council's dog warden service is not particularly visible to the public. The warden mainly patrols the Council's parks and open spaces but this is only during normal working hours.

Diversity

- 40 The Council is developing a robust approach to equality and diversity. The Council has achieved level 2 equalities, has a diversity champion and has set up a cross service diversity group. The service has completed some equality impact assessments and is therefore developing a good understanding of to what extent it embraces and meets diverse needs and where gaps in provision remain. For example, a recent equalities assessment highlighted the difficulties of wheelchair users accessing the Council recycling banks.
- 41 The service is sensitive to the needs of all and can point to where diversity and human rights issues have shaped service delivery. For example:
- making good use of animation/symbols in recycling and litter campaigns to address poor literacy and engage with hard to reach groups;

- the district has a low and dispersed BME population which has been geographically mapped to enable a targeted response sensitive to different beliefs;
- offering facilities for alternative languages, formats etc on request and some alternative languages available via the website; and
- by offering concessions on charges for bulky waste, and in deprived areas like the Bellamy estate, organising a period of free community bulky waste collections.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 42** The waste collection and recycling service is delivering what it set out to do. The waste collection service is reliable with a low number of missed collections (15 per 100,000 collections in 2005/06) and 100 per cent of these collected the next day. There is no residual mess left behind after collections so the service does not contribute to litter on streets.
- 43** The bulky collection service offered to domestic customers is responsive and effectively integrated with other services and objectives. Ninety-five per cent of collections (2005/06) are within the Council's five day response target. Customers contacting the Council about a furniture collection are directed to one of the areas' charitable re-use schemes first. This approach supports the national agenda for waste.
- 44** The Council is behind others in embracing the national agenda to reduce, re-use and recycle waste but performance in this area is improving. The most recent published comparative data (for 2004/05) put Mansfield in the worst 25 per cent of councils nationally for the amount of waste recycled/composted, at 17 per cent and the amount of waste collected, at 444kg/head of population. In 2005/06 the unaudited performance in both these measures improved; to almost 24 per cent of waste recycled/composted (exceeding the statutory performance standard) and 407kg of waste collected per head of population, a decrease of 8.25 per cent on the previous year.
- 45** The trade waste service is highly regarded by customers with 96 per cent satisfaction levels in 2005. Although the Council promotes the tidy business scheme to all businesses in the district it does not offer recycling as part of the trade waste service, but knows there is support for this from existing customers. The service is therefore not contributing to the national agenda to reduce, re-use or recycle waste.
- 46** The local environment, once acknowledged as being dirty, is getting cleaner, but cleanliness varies and some areas remain below acceptable standards. The most recent published comparative data (for 2004/05) showed that 25 per cent of relevant land was littered to a heavy/significant extent, in the worst 25 per cent of councils nationally. This improved to 19 per cent in 2005/06. The Council's streetcare service is successful in delivering what it promises to do in many of its responsive service areas such as fly poster, graffiti and fly tip removal.

An investment in neighbourhood cleansing teams and pragmatic approach to clearing up litter on marginal and private land has enabled the Council to transform previously blighted areas and clean up the town centre. This improvement has been recognised through winning the 'East Midlands least littered town Award' in 2005. However, whilst more flexible working practices such as extended working times adopted by the town centre team has resulted in a more consistent level of cleanliness, this not the case for the area based teams. Routine cleansing operations are carried out on weekdays and not at times when they would have more impact, for example to coincide with school hours. Littering outside schools such as the Garibaldi is an acknowledged problem.

- 47 Dog fouling is a key issue for local people. Despite a controversial education campaign in 2005, the public still perceive dog fouling to be a problem. Parks, open spaces and some pavements have dog fouling on them. The Council knows that the public support strict enforcement actions through feedback from its focus groups. But the actions taken by the Council so far has not addressed local concerns.
- 48 The majority of the district's open spaces are attractive and well maintained. The town centre has many attractive areas laid to traditional bedding plants and in the summer there is a proliferation of hanging baskets and planters. The Council has been successful in winning the East Midlands in Bloom competition on many of the 13 years it has entered.
- 49 In 2005 the Council successfully introduced a more proactive approach to enforcement and education on litter and other issues associated with environmental anti-social behaviour. The Council has some successful publicity campaigns such as such as the 'GRIME monster' and education campaigns targeted at teenagers for example the 'slam dunk your junk' poster developed through a local school. The number of enforcement actions is increasing through the use of fixed penalty fines but the Council has yet to deploy covert surveillance as part of its enforcement programme at known fly tipping hot spots.
- 50 The Council has developed some good individual approaches to addressing wider environmental aims. These include; providing energy efficiency advice to residents, implementing an environmental purchasing policy which includes energy and developing an environmental management policy for its flagship parks. However, progress with improving the energy rating of the Council's housing stock is behind that of others. The SAP rating for 2004/05 was 53, in the worst quartile nationally and only up from 49 in three years. Overall the Council does not have a systematic approach to wider environmental issue and is not able to assess its environmental impacts or prioritise where resources should be targeted in the future.
- 51 Comparative levels of public satisfaction with environment services are low. The last published BVPIs for 2003/04 show that satisfaction with recycling, waste collection and cleanliness is in the worst quartiles nationally. Satisfaction with parks and open spaces and the way the Council handles complaints is below the median. The latest quality of life indicators show that environmental issues are a concern.

The percentage of the public that consider that vandalism, graffiti rubbish, litter and abandoned vehicles are a problem are all high, and in the worst quartiles nationally. However, the Council has been tracking the public's satisfaction with cleanliness through its own surveys and this shows that satisfaction is improving, 52 per cent in 2005/06 compared with the 2003/04 BVPI level of only 37 per cent. In addition there are high levels of satisfaction with specific services such as 95 per cent satisfaction with bulky waste collections.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 52** Overall the service is not especially value for money. There has been no exploration of alternative methods of service delivery and all are delivered in house. Costs for services are influenced both positively and negatively by contextual factors. However, the Council does not know to what extent these impact on the service as it has yet to conduct a review of value for money.
- 53** The Council has a good understanding of the contextual issues relating to deprivation that put upward pressure on the cost of cleansing operations, but there is less appreciation of the factors that keep comparative costs for services down. For example, the district is densely populated and relatively compact with waste disposal sites within relatively short distances. In addition, overall wage levels of the area are low and the Council has few problems in recruitment or retention of staff.
- 54** The Council's overall comparative net spending on environment is above average. Within the 2004/05 spending profile.
- Net spending on waste/recycling per head of population is amongst district councils that spend the least and the BVPI for cost of waste collection per household was below the median at £37.86. Performance and satisfaction for the same period was comparatively poor.
 - Street cleansing costs per head of population at £11.50 are above the average. Performance and satisfaction for the same period was comparatively poor.

Investment in the service has been targeted to address poor performance as an organisational priority. As a consequence costs in 2005/06 rose to £13.02 per head of population for street cleansing and £42.65 per household for waste collection/recycling. Performance in both services improved for that period.

- 55** The Council conducts benchmarking with APSE to compare the costs of some services with its family group. These show that some services such as bulky and clinical waste collections are relatively low cost services and overall spend on parks and open spaces is low at £21 per household. In addition, the trade waste service returned a healthy 15 per cent surplus on turnover in 2004/05. However, the Council does not routinely conduct process benchmarking to compare how efficient services are with others including the private sector.

- 56 The majority of service is run in-house with only minor areas such as specialist tree maintenance outsourced. This includes the production of bedding plants at the Council's nursery and the management of the Council's transport fleet via its own transport maintenance facilities. There has been very little or no recent exposure to competition. As improvements and additions to the service have come on stream over the past two years, such as the street wardens and new types of waste/recycling collections these have continued to be delivered in-house.
- 57 There is an increasing awareness of value for money. This is influencing procurement decisions for example the purchase of new waste bins which has resulted in a 15 per cent saving. There has been a steady improvement in value for money in the service over the past three years. For example, waste collection rounds have been re-configured following an independent consultants review. This has allowed the Council to absorb additional work within existing resources such as new housing and green waste collections introduced to improve recycling rates.
- 58 It is not clear if costs are commensurate with performance and outcomes. The Council has not undertaken a comprehensive review of resources, productivity and the efficiency of activities to ensure that the Council's investment is value for money. Without a clear understanding of this, the Council cannot be sure by how much contextual factors influence costs either positively or negatively; if it needs to invest more or drive further efficiencies. There are also some factors which are negative indicators of value for money. For example, the Council has so far made limited use of technology or business process re-engineering to improve efficiency, reduce overheads and improve value for money. Processes are heavily dependent on the use of paper systems and the parks service (alone) has retained the financial management arrangements operated under compulsory competitive tendering.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 59 The service is developing a good track record of improvement. The district is getting cleaner with less litter and less graffiti, and this is supported by a balanced approach to education and enforcement. Whilst performance in key indicators has lagged behind that of others, progress is being made. Successful changes to the waste service have resulted in improved recycling performance and less waste to landfill. The Council is starting to improve value for money through a more flexible workforce and working practices. However, cleanliness has not improved in all areas of the district at the same rate as other areas.
- 60 The Council can demonstrate improvements have been made to the local environment and the quality of life for residents over the past three years. External funding and council resources have been invested in street cleansing; targeted in areas of the district that matter, such as the town centre and the most deprived wards. The service now operates on an area team basis with specialist teams for the town centre, graffiti removal and a rapid response team covering issues like fly-tip removal and out-of-hours working. As a result, the district is getting cleaner with less litter and less graffiti. Fly tips, once taking up to 90 days to remove, are now cleared within one day. The improvement, particularly in the town centre, is recognised by local residents. It is also contributing to cross cutting benefits, such as community safety by reducing the fear of crime and has made it easier for the Council to let property on some estates like Bellamy when previously it was difficult.
- 61 The improvements to the street cleaning service have been supported by a balanced approach to education and enforcement. External funding was invested in ten new street wardens in 2005. The number of enforcement actions, mainly through fixed penalty notices has consequently risen to an average of three per week, half for minor fly tipping and the others for litter dropped in the street or thrown from cars. At the same time, the Council launched its GRIME campaign (Greater Respect in Mansfield's Environment) which is helping change local people's perception towards littering. The Council's research shows awareness of the campaign increased between September 2005 and February 2006 from 17 to 71 per cent of residents surveyed and that 16 per cent of those surveyed had changed their behaviour towards littering.
- 62 The Council has successfully changed the waste service to support the national agenda to reduce, re-use, and recycle more waste. This includes:
- the successful roll-out of an alternate week refuse and recycling collection scheme to cover 95 per cent of households between 2003-2004, which is contributing towards increasing recycling rates;
 - increasing the number of mini recycling centres from 20 to 23 resulting in an increase in the amount of glass collected for recycling;

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- reinforcing the policy on no side waste and closed lids on wheeled bins in 2005 resulting in the amount of waste collected falling by 8.25 per cent from 444 kg per head of population in 2004/05 to 407 kg (unaudited) in 2005/06; and
- promoting the use of home composting so that around 20 per cent of households now have this facility to divert compostable waste from their domestic rubbish.

63 It is easier to contact the Council. In 2004, the Council successfully introduced a single point of contact for the service, including cleanliness, waste and recycling queries. Eighty-five per cent of queries are answered within the target of 15 seconds and only around 5 per cent of calls do not get through; a more consistent and responsive performance than before. More than eighty per cent of calls are now dealt with first time by the customer contact centre. In addition, the volume of contacts relating to reported litter problems is decreasing as the district is improving. This has released management time from routine enquiries.

64 The service has a good record of responding to external challenge. For example, the Council has successfully implemented changes to improve the flexibility of its workforce and working practices highlighted as weaknesses in the 2003 CPA assessment. These changes improve value for money in the service, in that the Council is using its resources more effectively. These include:

- creating a town centre operations team that brought together a number of different roles and operating practices. Resulting in a multifunctional team with extended and weekend operating hours that more closely matches the needs of the town centre; and
- introducing a concept of 'banked hours' for refuse/recycling operatives, reflecting the resources required to collect either residual waste or waste for recycling.

65 The performance track record against all key BVPIs is positive, although actual performance does not compare well with other similar authorities. Recycling/composting rates have increased year on year from 4.5 per cent in 2002/03 to 17 per cent in 2004/05, although this was still amongst the lowest 25 per cent when compared to other English district councils. Unaudited data shows that recycling/composting has increased to almost 24 per cent for 2005/06. The amount of waste collected year on year has fluctuated in the last three years, but in 2004/05 was in the 25 per cent of councils that collected the most. However the weight of waste collected per head of population has fallen from 433kg per head of population in 2002/03 to 407 (unaudited) kilograms per head of population in 2005/06. The percentage of land littered to a significant or heavy extent has now improved from 58 per cent in 2003/04 to 25 per cent in 2004/05 and to 19 per cent (unaudited) in 2005/06 although this remains poorer than most councils. Service delivery is therefore improving; however there is some work to do to compare better with similar councils.

- 66 Satisfaction with services has recently improved. Satisfaction with refuse, recycling and cleanliness were all in the poorest performing 25 per cent, of English councils, in national surveys conducted in 2003/04. However, since then the Council's own surveys have shown an improvement. In 2005, 87 per cent were satisfied with the recycling service, compared to 64 per cent in the 2003/04 national survey. A MORI survey in December 2004 showed that 67 per cent of local people felt that improvements had been made to the local environment compared to 45 per cent in a similar survey in 2002.
- 67 Although satisfaction with services has improved overall, the Council has not been successful in addressing the public's concerns about dog nuisance and the cleanliness in some areas of the district such as Grange Farm, Ladybrook and Bull Farm. Although the Council has invested in an education campaign and dog waste bins, provides poop scoop bags free of charge and has a dog warden, dog fouling is still perceived to be an issue by local people. Reported dog nuisances rose between 2002/03 and 2003/04 from 108 to 160. In addition, the public recognise the improving cleanliness of the town centre but are dissatisfied with lower standards elsewhere. Cleanliness has not improved at the same rate in all areas, raising standards and awareness has resulted in raised expectations of the Council by the public.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 68 The Council has plans for improvement that aim to improve the service and address most current weaknesses, the concerns of local people, and wider environmental aims. Performance management is improving and the Council is using learning effectively, but a focus on value for money, and effective challenge are under-developed.
- 69 The Council's aims for the environment reflect local issues for a clean and tidy environment. National and regional aims relating to cleanliness and waste are included two key strategies for the service, the Litter Plan and the Waste Management Plan which provide focus and direction for the period 2006-10. Overall targets do not aim to go beyond regional or national targets but given the scale of local issues to be addressed the Council's approach to strategic planning has been cautious but pragmatic.
- 70 Strategic and service planning is improving. There is good integration between plans including the community strategy and most actions are measurable and some outcomes are articulated. For example, there are responses times for routine and reported cleansing operations, so it is clear how the service intends to deliver corporate priorities and other partnership targets. However, plans do not currently include financial information such as budget, income and targets for unit costs which would enable an increased focus on efficiency and value for money.
- 71 There is less clarity about the Council's ambitions and approach to wider environmental issues such as demonstrating environmental stewardship, minimising the use of resources and its contribution to climate change. Currently there is no overarching strategy for this, although government targets are addressed in individual service areas. The Council has yet to demonstrate community leadership in this area.

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72 The Council is aiming to improve the service and address most current weaknesses, the concerns of local people, and wider environmental aims. The plans are co-ordinated, robust and deliverable and include the following.

- Improving recycling performance to 40 per cent by providing a green waste collection service to all households who want one. An additional 20,000 households will receive a new wheeled bin collection service for garden waste during 2006/07. It is predicted that this will be sufficient for the majority of households with a garden and who want a green waste service to be covered. The Council is committed to provide the service where it is required and will provide the service to any remaining household after 2006/07.
- Extending access to a kerbside recycling scheme for the remaining 5 per cent of properties in the district by 2008 including non standard properties such as flats.
- Promoting the minimisation of residual waste collected and going to landfill through a policy of issuing smaller, 180 litre residual waste bins to all new properties and where bins have to be replaced through damage or loss. This will be supported by tight control of the number of second bins issued for larger families, a new county-wide initiative to promote home composting still further. Strict enforcement of waste policies such as no garden waste in the residual bin which will be enforced using new powers under the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act.
- Full implementation of the amalgamation of the parks and street cleansing service in March 2006 to improve the co-ordination of service delivery, such as litter picking before grass cutting, flexibility of staff and better supervision. This should deliver more consistent standards of cleanliness and maintenance across the district.
- The completion of the market place enhancement scheme in May 2006 which provides a more attractive focal point for the town and is designed to be easier to clean and maintain.
- Improvements to litter enforcement through the adoption of powers under the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act, and a new policy clarifying the Council's approach to young people committing littering offences.
- Improvements to marketing and communication by the introduction of corporate standards for the layout, branding and content of materials intended for external audiences. In addition the Council is planning to re-introduce a council newspaper in order to improve the public's access and understanding of its services and performance.
- The production of a climate change strategy for the district to provide clear direction for the Council for wider environmental aims and demonstrate support for its commitment to the Nottingham Declaration in 2005.

- 73 The Council also has some other aspirations which have not yet crystallised into plans for the future such as providing a recycling service to trade waste customers. In addition, it is exploring how it can respond to the public's desire for kerbside glass recycling. This demonstrates that continuous improvement is becoming embedded in the service.
- 74 Performance management is improving, but a performance management culture is not evident in all areas. A performance management framework is in place and monitoring and reporting takes place on a regular basis. However, the performance management system is not sensitive enough to have identified problems with cleanliness standards in some areas (as outlined earlier in this report). This hinders the Council's ability to ensure consistently high standards of service are delivered.
- 75 There is an increasing awareness of the importance of improving value for money in the service's approach to strategic and service planning, but this is not fully developed or embedded. Cost and performance information is still reported separately, but on a positive note value for money is integrated into all best value reviews and efficiency reviews have been introduced. Some benchmarking on costs using APSE data is being conducted, but this tends to be at service level and does not cover detailed unit costs or resource benchmarking. A county-wide efficiency review of waste collection arrangements by the County wide waste partnership is scheduled to be completed by September 2006. This may have significant implications for the waste service costs and efficiency. Systematic and effective performance management arrangements are required to drive continued improvements in value for money.
- 76 The service learns from others, user feedback and from its own experience. For example, it looked at how other councils use mobile technology for allocating work and receiving information to front line staff who work in the district. There is a good use of feedback from users and from complaints data captured by the Council's customer relationship management system. Changes to services are also subject to a formal review to ensure that they are delivering what was intended. For example the Council has analysed the composition of the residual waste collected so that it can develop its services to meet its recycling target.
- 77 There is not a strong track record of internal challenge in the service. Scrutiny is starting to develop; there is a work programme planned for the first time in 2006/07 and performance is now regularly reported to select committee three for review on a quarterly basis. However, there is limited evidence that scrutiny has provided robust challenge to the service, apart from an early success with improving the Council's approach to sickness management. A recent options appraisal for the future Council's bedding plant nursery did not provide a robust challenge for the current operation or its future delivery. The Council's preferred options to re-locate the nursery facility locks it into a long term commitment without the necessary flexibility to change or reduce operations in the future. Consequently, there remains a risk that this service, and any others subject to similar reviews, will continue to be delivered in a manner that may not represent value for money.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 78 The Council has adequate capacity to deliver further improvements to the service. There is a good track record of securing external funding and the Council is well placed to attract future funding. The service is well resourced and service capacity is increasing through more flexible HR policies and a reduction in sickness. The use of new technology, procurement and partnerships to increase capacity is developing. However, there is no detailed medium term financial model for the service and there are some risks and challenges to manage in the near future.
- 79 The Council has a track record of securing external funding that has made a positive difference to the service. Funds secured from DEFRA, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Liveability Fund has been invested in the service and supported the delivery of improvements explained earlier in this report. Mansfield is well placed to attract future external funding and support because of the overall level of deprivation in the district. This includes potential benefits from the Nottinghamshire Local Area Agreement where the county and district councils will co-operate in delivering a more consistent range of services across the county allocating resources according to need.
- 80 It is not clear if the Council has the financial capacity to deliver the Council's plans for improving the service. The medium term financial plan does not detail what the future funding requirements will be for the service and how the Council intends to meet the levels of predicted spend. Although the overall financial position of the Council is sound there are financial pressures and savings will be necessary to maintain reserve levels. The medium term financial requirements of the service are fairly complex and will be influenced by a number of different factors, positive and negative, which have not been pulled together into an integrated financial model within the service plans. These include the following.
- For parks and streetcare:
 - the ending of NRF funding for the neighbourhood wardens in 2008;
 - the revenue cost of the market place enhancement scheme including ongoing maintenance of a new water feature; and
 - the potential sale of the current nursery site (estimated to be worth £3 million) and relocation to a new site.
 - For the waste and recycling service:
 - changes to residual waste disposal facilities (as both the current landfill sites close within the next two years) which will increase time and transport costs;
 - expansion of kerbside recycling of compostable waste at a predicted increased revenue cost of £60,000 p.a. plus £400,000 capital - allocated in the budget for 2006/07;
 - expansion of the dry recycling service to non standard properties;
 - a second compostable waste disposal site available in the south of the district which will reduce transport costs;

- a new NJLAW partnership material recycling facility (MRF) to be located in the district which will reduce transport costs and may facilitate extended waste transfer operating hours, and in the longer term a proposed waste incinerator; and
- the impact of new legislation such as the introduction of the landfill allowance trading scheme (LATS).

Some work is underway to develop an exit strategy for the NRF funding in street cleansing and some mainstreaming has taken place in the past two years, but the overall sustainability of the service remains a challenge. Accurate medium term financial planning enables more stable service planning with effective management of risk.

- 81** The service is well resourced and staff capacity has increased. New terms and conditions and changes to working practices have provided greater flexibility and enabled staff to work variable hours as needed. More changes are planned as the full amalgamation of the parks and streetcare service takes effect, such as the introduction of a generic job description. In addition, through more proactive management, the level of sickness absence has reduced significantly from over 20 days for staff working on waste and recycling and 11.3 days for parks and streetcare workers in 2004/05 to 13 days and 7.2 days per employee respectively in 2005/06. This has resulted in less reliance on agency staff and overtime to cover for employees who are sick. This increased capacity is enabling the service to absorb new work and expand services at less cost.
- 82** The service has a staff resource that is well trained, capable and aware of the service objectives and their contribution to them. The service has a clear training programme managed in conjunction with HR and staff have received training in health and safety and equality. A new structure for the service is being implemented and is designed to better support delivery of key priorities and provide more effective management capacity. Managers and supervisors have regular meetings with refuse or street cleaning teams to discuss progress against performance and to cascade relevant corporate or service management messages. Staff feel that they are involved in the change and have opportunity to have their say about the direction of the service. The commitment of staff has resulted in the successful implementation of Council policies that may be unpopular such as not collecting side waste.
- 83** The service is beginning to use technology with the potential to create efficiencies, although it is too early to determine their success. Satellite vehicle tracking is now in place on the refuse collection rounds, which gives the potential for better management of the waste collection vehicles. However, the Council is still evaluating ways in which investment in technology can bring about improvements and it remains unclear as to the level of efficiency savings or service improvements that will be realised.

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- 84** The service's approach to increasing capacity through procurement and partnership is developing. The service is starting to actively use joint procurement to reduce costs such as the recent purchase of wheeled bins as part of the East Midlands Centre of Excellence live e-auction and the purchase of fuel via a county wide contract. The service effectively partnered with ENGAMS to develop the Council's GRIME campaign and is using a partnership arrangement with Nottinghamshire County Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council on a household recycling incentive project. However, the Council tends to deliver services itself and may be missing an opportunity to use partnership capacity or develop community capacity. For example, using community pay back schemes for specific area clear up projects.