

Service Inspection Report

July 2006



# **Sustainable Environment**

**Winchester City 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 coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

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

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

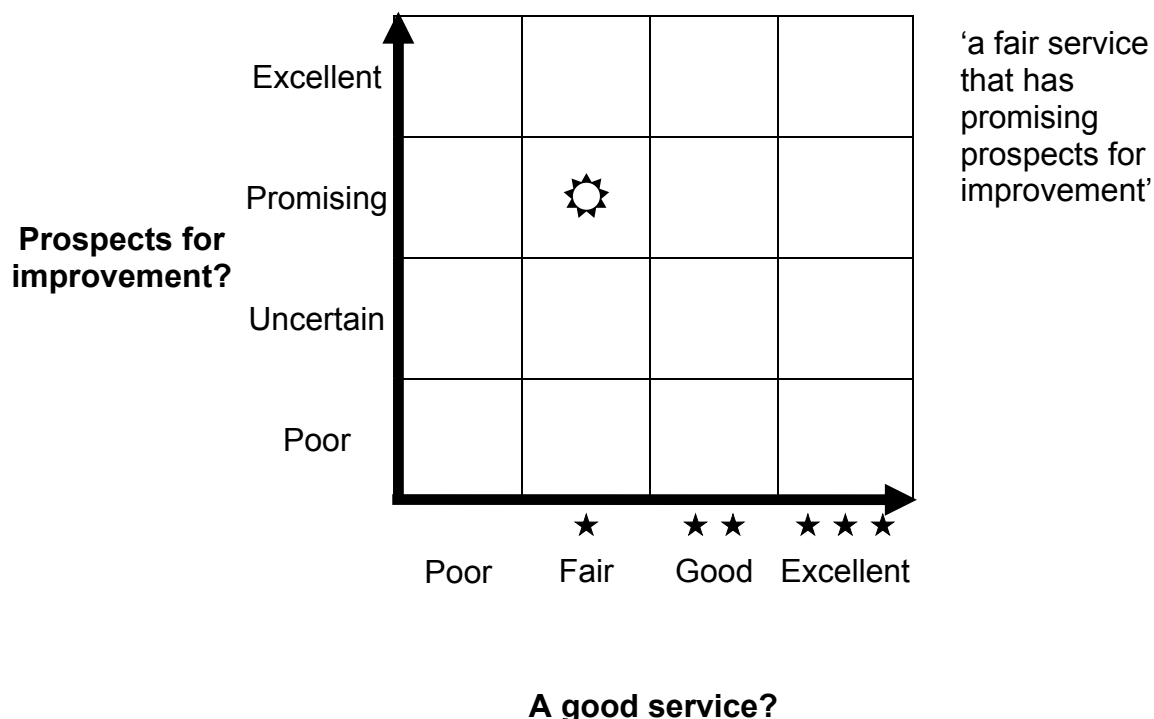
## Summary

- 1 Achieving a more sustainable environment is part of Winchester City Council's vision for the future of the district and it is one of its eight corporate values. The Council has made significant progress since its Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003 to strengthen focus on its priorities, including sustainability.
- 2 The Council's customers are generally satisfied with environmental services that it delivers. National indicators show some good performance, for example in street cleanliness. The Council has also had some success in delivering sustainable outcomes, such as using scarce development land more effectively by securing smaller dwellings to meet local needs and helping the County Council in measures to reduce car usage and improve air quality in the city centre.
- 3 However, the Council has not yet embedded sustainability in service planning across the organisation, and it is missing opportunities to act in a sustainable way. The Council does not have good information about the needs of the diverse communities within its area and it is not engaging with its customers at a community level.
- 4 There are sustainability weaknesses within key services. The Council is not meeting its recycling targets, one of its key priorities, and its performance has declined compared to other councils. It does not systematically build sustainable working practices into other services, for example grounds maintenance and street cleaning, and it has not worked effectively with others to increase biodiversity - although this has changed recently. Significantly, it has not improved the working practices of its own staff, for example by reducing the use of the private car for journey to work and work trips. It is not leading by example.
- 5 The Council recognises many of these challenges and has made good progress in recent months on plans to address them, including clearer recognition of sustainable development as a priority in the newly adopted Corporate Strategy 2006/09. As part of its plans to adopt a more strategic approach to management, senior managers are now focusing on a more corporate approach to ensuring sustainability is integrated into the Council's decision making and day-to-day practices. However, the main Environment and Sustainability Strategies do not provide a comprehensive corporate vision for sustainability.
- 6 The Council has also made good progress on detailed proposals that will lead to improvement. For example, it has successfully piloted alternate weekly collection of waste and recyclables to improve recycling rates and is now rolling out this system across the district, and has made good progress on plans to ensure more sustainable building in a major development area. However, in other areas it has yet to fully develop its proposals, decide what priority they will have, and ensure the resources will be available to carry them forward.
- 7 The Council's capacity to move forward in the future is constrained by tight revenue resources, but it is now much clearer about the priority it intends to give to improving the sustainable delivery of services.

## Scoring the service

- 8 This inspection has been undertaken in two phases. Our original inspection activity was undertaken in October 2005, when we concluded that Winchester City Council provided a 'fair', one-star service that had uncertain prospects for improvement. The second judgement was affected by the timing of some key initiatives the Council was undertaking, about which the outcome was unclear given the Council's previous track record on the issue of sustainable development. In discussion with the Council, we therefore agreed that it would be appropriate to undertake some brief inspection activity in April/May 2006, to assess progress on those initiatives. This report takes account of both phases of our inspection activity. Our assessment of 'how good is the service' is primarily informed by our original work, but our assessment of the 'prospects for improvement' takes account of more recent information and progress.
- 9 As a result of this later work, we now assess Winchester City 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 as a whole, and are outlined below.

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



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

10 The service is a fair, one-star service because:

- sustainability is not embedded in service planning and the new Sustainability Strategy has not yet had a significant impact on the way that the Council operates;
- community engagement and service planning is focused on the district as a whole, it does not fully recognise the diversity of needs and interests within the district and there are limited arrangements for face to face contact with the customers in the east of the district or in the growing communities in the south;
- the Council is pursuing waste minimisation or re-use on a limited scale, and the Council is not meeting its high priority targets for recycling;
- the Council has had limited effectiveness in improving biodiversity in the maintenance of its own land or in partnership with private land owners, and it does not build sustainable working practices into street cleaning and grounds maintenance operations (although this has improved in recent months);
- the Council is not leading by example by demonstrating low energy use and sustainable working practices; and
- it cannot demonstrate that it has mechanisms that have delivered good value for money to date across its environmental and planning services, although a recent major decision indicates a changed approach for the future.

11 However, despite these weaknesses, the service has a number of strengths:

- the Council has maintained an up to date local plan, based on sustainable principles; it is making satisfactory progress with its Local Development Framework; and it can show sustainability outcomes in terms of better use of scarce development land, better alignment of house types to local housing need, and addressing the energy use implications of major new development areas;
- it has provided active support for the County Council on sustainable transport initiatives, particularly in the city of Winchester, and it is responding effectively to air quality problems in the city;
- the Council is making satisfactory progress with its contaminated land strategy; and
- the Council provides effective street cleansing and grounds maintenance services.

### 12 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has a range of recent plans to improve sustainability and the environment, including the Sustainability Strategy, to 'put its own house in order';
- the Council's updated Corporate Strategy 2006/09 makes clear that sustainability is a priority area for action, and the Council has focused its Senior Managers Group's efforts on ensuring that it takes a more consistent approach to ensuring sustainability is integrated into its decision making and day-to-day practices;
- the Council has made good progress recently on major aspects of sustainability practice, including:
  - a good track record of local public satisfaction with waste collection and standards of cleanliness;
  - good results from its alternate weekly collection recycling pilot and clear plans, with supporting finance, to roll this out across the district (the first phase to be operational from November 2006);
  - agreeing a basis for new plans to ensure more sustainable building, in particular to reduce use of energy, in the major development area at Waterlooville west;
  - agreeing a Carbon Management Strategy and Draft Implementation Plan, which is now being put into action;
- the Council makes training available and has strengthened project planning and corporate planning practices; and
- the Council is amending its Procurement Strategy to improve sustainable procurement.

### 13 However:

- the Council lacks a comprehensive vision for what sustainability means in the Winchester context, and the priorities it is aiming to address, based on an understanding of the main issues that are relevant to the district's future and ability to influence them;
- many of its plans to improve sustainability performance are at a very early stage, and plans to empower senior managers to ensure sustainability is integrated into its decision making and day-to-day practices need further development;
- the Council's track record on sustainability has been mixed until recently - for example, the Council has been successful in achieving improvement in some areas such as traffic reduction, but not in some priority areas, such as recycling;
- it has not led by example on sustainability - for example, it is not active in enforcing laws on environmental crime such as flytipping or dropping litter and it has not made progress with its own sustainable travel plan;

- performance monitoring arrangements, such as a comprehensive range of sustainability indicators, are yet not in place and further work needs to be done to ensure responsibilities for sustainability are clear; and
- financial capacity to address sustainability issues is uncertain as revenue resources are stretched.

## Recommendations

- 14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate costs and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate.
- 15 As noted above, the Council has made considerable progress since the first phase of this inspection, such that our original draft recommendations have been largely superseded. In this context the inspection team now recommends that the Council should do the following, to build on its recent progress.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 The Council – together with its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) partners - should develop a clear vision for what the sustainability agenda means in practice in a Winchester context, and the priorities it is aiming to address. This vision should be based on an understanding of the main issues that are relevant to the district's future and to the Council's and partners' ability to influence them. In doing so, the Council should ensure:*

- the community strategy objectives address these key issues, setting out clearly what the LSP and Council are aiming to achieve over a defined period of time in the shorter term (say by 2010) and medium term (say by 2015), and then focus areas of activity and initiatives over time towards delivering these objectives;*
- it supports the objectives by targets that are practically deliverable at service level and can be monitored;*
- it develops the vision and targets in such a way as to achieve cross-party consensus, so the Council can be confident that it approaches this work in a truly cross-cutting way and that the vision and targets will be maintained over time;*
- it builds on the successful experience from recent informal scrutiny groups in helping to develop and agree long-term policy that all political groups can subscribe to; and*
- as part of this work, it should identify how the strategic and wider aspects of this agenda relate to local community outcomes, and build the potential for local community leadership and initiatives to both deliver sustainable outcomes but also raise awareness of the relationship between 'global' issues and 'local' actions.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are as follows.

- The Council, its partners and local people will have a clearer, more rounded and shared sense of what sustainable development priorities the Council is focusing on, and what outcomes are intended for the district.
- The Council and its partners will have a clear long-term basis for planning improvements to achieve these outcomes, and for measuring progress in delivering them.
- Councillors' understanding of the breadth and coherence of the sustainable development agenda will be improved.

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

### **Recommendation**

*R2 The Council should build on its approach of empowering senior managers to deliver the sustainable development agenda in a coordinated way, by addressing the following key issues.*

- *The Council should define more clearly the roles of Corporate Management Team and Senior Managers Group in promoting the sustainable development agenda - specifically, what should SMG be aiming to achieve, and how should CMT facilitate this.*
- *The Council should recognise that senior managers may not have the capacity to deliver this work (as opposed to developing the ideas and initiatives) while maintaining their existing service responsibilities, and they may need to be supported by resource to research, develop and implement some types of project. The role of the sustainability officer needs to be considered in this context, and having regard to the balance of effort needed in future between further policy development and project implementation.*
- *The Council needs to be clear, when allocating responsibilities for action, that the responsible person has the authority and expertise to deliver the initiatives allocated to them. It also needs to support this with appropriate project management arrangements given the potential complexity of progressing cross-cutting issues.*
- *The Council – together with its LSP partners – should evaluate current plans and strategies to ensure that sustainability is embedded, and implement routine sustainability appraisal in decision making. Internally, it should track this approach through staff appraisal, the performance management system and scrutiny.*

## 12 Sustainable Environment | Recommendations

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Managers and staff will be clearer about the expectations on them for delivering the Council's sustainability objectives, and more effectively enabled to do so.
- The Council will achieve better integration of sustainability into policy making and service planning.

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

### **Recommendation**

*R3 The Council should build on the successful learning from the consultancy work on the energy implications of development, to identify other areas which would benefit from guidance and raised awareness that can shape more sustainable future development proposals. Examples might include guidance on sustainable construction practices and planning for biodiversity. The Council should consider whether there are opportunities to progress such work with neighbouring authorities, which are affected by the same development pressures.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- the Council will be able to have a significant impact in the long term in promoting sustainability, by ensuring that new development systematically addresses all the relevant issues and by making clear its expectations to developers before they prepare their planning proposals.

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

### **Recommendation**

*R4 The Council needs to build on progress to overcome its past averseness to risk and its growing recognition that value for money is about the relationship between outcomes and costs, not just about low costs. It should develop a means of ranking environmental benefit and payback from activities and planned improvements, to assess these alongside financial payback assessments in relation to its investment decisions.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- The Council will be better placed to plan major improvements and investments so that they both contribute to its sustainability objectives and demonstrate more effectively its community leadership and social responsibility roles.

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

**Recommendation**

*R5 Councillors need to show continued leadership to ensure the alternate weekly waste collection system becomes fully operational, and have the courage to weather any opposition during the district-wide roll-out.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- the Council will achieve a major improvement in one of its priority areas - recycling - which is also a national priority.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs over and above those already planned, and should be maintained throughout the period of rolling out the new system.

# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 16 Winchester is situated in the south east of England, adjacent to Southampton and the Solent conurbation. The City Council administers an area of 250 square miles, which is predominantly rural and has the lowest population density of any of the Hampshire districts.
- 17 The district has an attractive built and natural environment. Winchester is an ancient cathedral city with an exceptional archaeology and built environment. In all, the district has 37 conservation areas and nearly 2,800 buildings listed as being of architectural or historic interest. The East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers about a quarter of the district, and about a fifth is covered by national and local nature conservation designations.
- 18 The population of the district is 109,000. The main service centre is the city of Winchester, which is home to about half the district population and is situated in the north of the district. The Council offices are located here. Alresford is a significant secondary service centre in the east. The communities of Bishops Waltham, Wickham, Denmead, Whiteley and Knowle lie in the south of district and tend to look outside the district to Southampton and Portsmouth for services. Population growth has been most rapid in these communities.
- 19 The population profile of the district is similar to the regional average, but with a slightly lower proportion of young people (18.5 per cent under 15 years of age compared to a regional average of 19.7 per cent) and a slightly higher proportion of older people (19.7 per cent of pensionable age compared to a regional average of 18.9 per cent). Some 5.2 per cent of the population are from communities other than white British compared to a regional average of 8.7 per cent.
- 20 The district has good communications, with the M3 motorway bisecting the district. The city is served by the Southampton to London main railway line and it has good access to airports at Heathrow and Southampton. Peak hour traffic congestion is, however, an important local issue.
- 21 The district has a buoyant local economy based on service industries and public services. A significant proportion of the local labour force finds employment outside the district, in particular London. Wage levels are six per cent above the regional average. Winchester has low levels of unemployment with 0.8 per cent unemployed (March 2004) against a regional average of 1.6 per cent. Government (ODPM) indices of deprivation show Winchester to be one of the least deprived districts in the country, ranked 339 out of 354, though there are some pockets of disadvantage in the city area and in the south of the district. Life expectancy is slightly higher than the regional average.

## The Council

- 22** At the time of both our site visits, the Liberal Democrat group controlled the Council with 25 of the 57 councillors. There were 21 Conservative, 6 independent and 4 Labour councillors, and one seat was vacant. Following the May 2006 elections, the Conservative group took control of the council with 29 of the 57 councillors. There are now 21 Liberal Democrat, 4 independent and 3 Labour councillors. The Council operates with a Cabinet of seven members from the majority group. A Principal Scrutiny Committee provides scrutiny, supported by four scrutiny panels. Regulatory committees make decisions on development control and licensing issues.
- 23** The Council employs 506 (full time equivalent) staff across all services. It has a gross budget of £85 million (£14 million net) (2005/06). The Council still owns and manages its housing stock.
- 24** The Chief Executive is supported by four directors. The responsibilities of the Director of Community and the Director of Development include environmental services and development control respectively. Following a recent restructuring, the Chief Executive's Unit is now responsible for corporate policy, including the sustainability strategy, support for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the community strategy, land use planning policy and performance management.
- 25** At the time of our original inspection the Council's values and strategic priorities were identified in its Corporate Strategy 2005/2008 and Performance Plan 2005. Its values incorporate customer focus, leadership, prudence, communication, learning, partnership and diversity. In addition, the Council strives to act in a sustainable way and encourage others to do likewise.
- 26** The Council's priorities include aiming to provide a better service by:
- addressing the longer term aim of providing decent affordable homes;
  - creating communities that feel safe and further reduce levels of crime and anti social behaviour;
  - minimising pollution and waste and making efficient use of resources (the 'Green Agenda');
  - ensuring that everyone can play a full part in the life of their community;
  - achieving a diverse urban and rural economy; and
  - increasing access to cultural and sporting activities.

The Performance Plan sets out outcomes to be realised over the next three years.

- 27** Since our original inspection the Council has updated its corporate strategy. The Council's priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy 2006/2009 (approved in March 2006) remain unchanged, but the strategy makes clearer reference to the overall green agenda objective and to component aspects of sustainability such as biodiversity.

- 28 In January 2004 the Commission assessed the Council as part of the national programme of comprehensive performance assessment (CPA). It judged it to be a fair council. The report was critical of the Council's approach to sustainability, concluding that it was not fully embedded in the delivery of council services. The Council lacked a cohesive strategy to give its efforts clear direction and there were no local performance indicators or targets to measure the contribution the Council is making to the quality of life of local residents.

### **The Government's sustainability objectives for local councils**

- 29 The government's updated UK Sustainable Development Strategy - Securing the Future was published in March 2005. It identifies four priorities for the UK:

- sustainable consumption and production;
- climate change and energy;
- natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and
- sustainable communities.

- 30 For sustainable communities, the strategy aims:

*'to create sustainable communities in England that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level:*

*- balancing and integrating the social, economic and environmental components of their community*

*- meeting the needs of existing and future generations, and*

*- respecting the needs of other communities in the wider region or internationally to make their communities sustainable.'*

- 31 Local government has an important role in delivering the strategy at a local level, and many local government functions address these objectives. The government has set a number of service specific targets for local councils in support of its sustainability goals. For a district council such as Winchester, these include the following.

- Planning - preparing new Local Development Frameworks to embody sustainability principles set out in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1 and related guidance, and controlling new development to minimise impacts and secure more effective use of development land.
- Waste management - encouraging waste minimisation, re-use of waste and increased recycling to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. The government has set specific recycling targets for all councils, based on past performance but which are intended to lead to challenging levels of improvement.
- Air quality - carrying out a survey of their areas and preparing an Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Management Plans to deal with areas where conditions fall below certain standards.

- Contaminated land - identifying contaminated sites, preparing risk assessments and action plans in appropriate circumstances.
- Transportation - working with the County Council as highway authority to meet sustainable transport targets set out in the Local Transport Plan, for example increasing bus and cycle use.
- Biodiversity - preparing Biodiversity Action Plans to show how the Council is to lead action to protect important environments and improve biodiversity.
- In addition, the government has set councils sustainability targets for their own operations.

### **The Council's sustainable environment service**

- 32** This inspection examines how the Council is working to provide a more sustainable environment for the people of Winchester district. It draws upon one of the Council's core values:

*'acting in a sustainable way and encouraging others to do likewise'.*

- 33** The inspection looks at the longer term decisions that the Council is making today that will affect local sustainability in the future. It examines how the Council has responded to the weaknesses in this area that was identified in the CPA. Sustainability is a broad theme that extends across service boundaries, but it focuses particularly on the environment. The inspection scope covers:
- planning - planning policies and supplementary guidance aimed at securing sustainable patterns of development and sustainable forms of development;
  - waste collection and street cleansing arrangements and how these contribute to lower levels of waste arising, more effective re-use, higher levels of recycling and lower levels of waste disposed to landfill;
  - environmental health, in particular pollution control and air quality;
  - transportation initiatives in support of Hampshire County Council;
  - measures to protect the natural environment and promote biodiversity; and
  - ways in which the Council is altering its own behaviours to reduce the environmental impact of its operations.
- 34** These activities fall predominantly within the directorates of the Chief Executive, Development, and Community. The overall net cost of these services is about £6.6 million, nearly half the Council's net revenue expenditure.
- 35** As noted above, this report takes account of two phases of inspection activity. Our assessment of 'how good is the service' is primarily informed by our original work, but our assessment of the 'prospects for improvement' takes account of more recent information and progress.

## How good is the service?

### What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 36 Winchester City Council has responded to the national sustainability agenda in a variety of ways.
- 37 The City Council has led preparation of the Winchester Community Strategy. Published in November 2004, it has nine themes that embody the sustainability concepts of health and well being, inclusiveness and prosperity. Particularly relevant to this inspection are the themes 'High Quality Environment' and 'Transport and Access'. The plan sets out a series of actions against these themes. They focus on improving engagement at a community level, enhancing the distinctiveness of local communities, improving local quality of life and reducing the impact of new development, better waste management to reduce landfill, achieving better air quality, reducing energy use, encouraging biodiversity, improving access to sustainable transport and reducing vehicle emissions. These themes and actions address local as well as national and global sustainability issues.
- 38 The Corporate Plan identifies one of the Council's eight aims as striving to be an organisation which 'acts in a sustainable way and encourages others to do likewise'. The aims also highlight communication, partnership, diversity and a focus on the needs of residents as a top priority.
- 39 The Plan sets out eleven priorities for the Council. These are summarised in paragraph 26 above. The key sustainable environment priority is the 'green agenda'. This aims to minimise pollution and make efficient use of resources by tackling waste issues and promoting more sustainable transport alternatives to the car.
- 40 The aims of the Corporate Plan are worked up in a series of strategies and service plans. The central strategy for the sustainable environment is the Environment Strategy 2004 - 2008. This sets out a vision and a series of actions for open spaces, street scene, countryside, biodiversity, trees and hedgerows and environmental protection. These are brought together into a 23 point action plan.
- 41 In December 2004 the Council also adopted a sustainability strategy, A Sustainable City Council - doing our bit, inspiring others. This examines the Council's own activities and puts forward a series of proposals to make them more sustainable.

- 42 The Winchester Local Plan sets out sustainable environment aims and shows how the Council proposes to accommodate development to meet regional needs in a sustainable way. This sets out a strategy for meeting the strategic housing requirement identified in the Hampshire Structure Plan through large development sites (MDAs). It shows how these sites should be developed to create communities which have the capacity to be self sustaining. It also lays the foundations for guidance on detailed design of new development to reduce its environmental impact. This work is carried through into a master planning exercise for the MDA and provides a framework for detailed site development briefs and local design statements for MDA and other sites.
- 43 At the time of our original inspection the Council had not yet adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan to identify priorities for conservation and enhancement of habitats and an action plan to improve local biodiversity. However, the Winchester Natural Environment Forum was at an advanced stage with this work and the consultation draft was published in November 2005.
- 44 This material is brought together in service plans, which reflect the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan.

## Table 2 Winchester's Sustainable Environment Aims

The Council's sustainable environment aims, grouped against national sustainability priorities

Aim	Source
<b>Sustainable Consumption and Production</b>	
Introducing sustainable working practices, including procurement and accommodation strategy	Sustainability Strategy
<b>Climate Change and Energy</b>	
Reducing energy use	Community Plan
Encouraging sustainable transport and extending park and ride	Community Plan; Corporate Plan priority
<b>Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement</b>	
Achieving better air quality - through Air Quality Management Plan	Community Plan; Corporate Plan priority; Environment Strategy
Better waste management to reduce landfill, - alternate weekly collection of waste and recyclables	Community Plan; Corporate Plan priority; Environment Strategy
Encouraging biodiversity	Community Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan

Aim	Source
<b>Sustainable Communities</b>	
Improving engagement at a community level	Community Plan
Enhancing the distinctiveness of local communities	Community Plan; Corporate Plan priority; Environment Strategy
Improving local quality of life - more sustainable forms of development	Community Plan; Local Plan
Forming a partnership to coordinate action on countryside issues	Environment Strategy
Reviewing grounds maintenance for effectiveness	Environmental Strategy
<b>General</b>	
Raising awareness providing leadership on sustainability issues	Environment Strategy, Sustainability Strategy
Using checklists to evaluate the sustainability of decisions and adopting performance indicators	Sustainability Strategy

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

- 45 Overall, weaknesses outweigh strengths in the Council's performance in securing a sustainable environment. Although national and local sustainability priorities are generally in alignment across the Council, sustainability performance varies from service to service. It has made little progress as yet to address issues of climate change and sustainable consumption through its own activities. There are weaknesses in its approach to protecting natural resources and enhancing the environment. It is not meeting important targets in recycling and it is not integrating sustainability into the delivery of its other services. It is, however, using its planning powers and air quality management effectively to mitigate damage to the environment and secure improvements. Despite weaknesses in community engagement, it is making good progress towards developing more sustainable communities by applying local plan policies and working with the County Council on sustainable transport initiatives.

### **Climate change and energy: sustainable consumption and production**

- 46 The Sustainability Strategy identifies a number of key weaknesses in the Council's own performance in addressing climate change and encouraging sustainable consumption.
- Most procurement decisions are made within departments and decisions can be based on short term costs and savings. There is no guidance to staff on sustainable procurement.
  - The Council's accommodation is located on a number of sites in Winchester and does not meet modern standards with regard to energy and water efficiency, and some office practices - for example work travel and use of ICT - are not sustainable. Average electricity consumption in council buildings is high and compares with the worst 25 per cent of councils, though consumption of fossil fuels is low.
  - Three quarters of staff live more than five miles from the Council offices, but staff travel to work arrangements have not been monitored since 1999 and the Council has not taken action to reduce car usage.
  - There is a recycling scheme for office waste, but this is not consistently effective and the Council does not monitor its performance.
- 47 The Sustainability Strategy contains proposals to address these issues and the Council is taking action in a number of areas. For example, the Council is updating its Procurement Strategy to reflect broader purchasing considerations and has recently adopted a Carbon Management Strategy which will focus particularly on reducing the Council's carbon footprint - a key issue in tackling climate change - especially from its buildings. The strategies are, however, new and have not yet had a significant impact on infrastructure or working practices.
- 48 Progress with the Council's green travel plan has been limited. For example, although new staff are required to use the park and ride most staff still have access to city centre parking facilities and there has been no significant progress to reduce car use. The lease car scheme reinforces existing working practices and does not discourage car use or encourage low emission vehicles. This sets a weak example to other employers, who are being encouraged to develop more sustainable practices through their own workplace travel plans.

### **Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement**

- 49 The Council is not meeting its waste management aims. Waste management performance is currently about average compared to other councils nationally, but is significantly lower than most of the Hampshire districts and it is not improving.
- 50 The amount of waste collected per household is lower (that is, better) than average compared to other district councils. In 2004/05 - latest available comparison data - the amount was 400kg (best 25 per cent performance was 380kg). This improved to 387kg (unaudited data) in 2005/06, at a time when nationally the amount of waste collected is growing.

- 51** The proportion of recycled and composted household waste is well below average compared to other district councils nationally. It was 18 per cent in 2004/05 (17.6 per cent recycling and 0.4 per cent composting) compared to the national median of 23.3 per cent, and worst 25 per cent of 16.6 per cent. Unaudited data indicates that this increased to 20.2 per cent in 2005/06 (18.9 per cent recycling and 1.3 per cent composting). These rates fall far short of the government's target of 30 per cent for Winchester for 2005/06. Although the Council encourages home composting, other green waste from outside the 'alternate weekly collection' (AWC) pilot area is not collected separately for composting (although it does not go to landfill, since most of the district's waste is sent via a County Council waste transfer station for incineration). There are no District Council-run initiatives to encourage re-use, although the Council provides textile banks at its bring sites. This is despite the fact that the Council is a member of the successful 'Integra' partnership with Hampshire County Council, recycling is a corporate priority and the Council has previously been a good performer in this area.
- 52** The Council delivers a good street cleaning service but, as client to an outsourced cleansing service, it does not actively promote sustainable service delivery. There is limited education or active enforcement of environmental controls, and the Council does not actively seek to improve sustainability through its management of the street cleansing contract. For example, there is no encouragement to recycle any street waste collected. Nevertheless, the street cleansing service delivers high standards of cleanliness (BVPI 109) which compared with the best 25 per cent of councils in 2005/06 and it also achieves top 25 per cent public satisfaction (2003/04) - the latest nationally available comparison data in both cases. The Council also achieves good performance on fly-tipping. This indicates a good focus on basic service delivery, but weaknesses in ensuring more sustainable outcomes.
- 53** Sustainability has not until recently been actively promoted in the Council's grounds maintenance. Although there were examples of good practice - for example, composting on site - at the time of our original inspection, apart from prescribing certain weed killers the contract contains no requirement to carry out maintenance in a sustainable way. The Council does not operate an environmental management system. There are no management plans for land that the Council manages to ensure that its assets are managed in a sustainable way. The Environment Strategy does not recognise sustainability as an issue in its action plan for grounds maintenance. However, following the adoption of the Sustainability Strategy and preparation of draft Biodiversity Action Plan, steps have been taken to integrate this approach in the work of the street scene team and grounds maintenance functions. There is high public satisfaction with parks and gardens, but until recently the Council has been missing opportunities to reduce the impact of its operations and improve sustainability.

- 54 The Council is not taking an effective lead on biodiversity across the district. The Council cannot point to schemes which have secured significant improvements in biodiversity and it does not have a comprehensive approach to this issue. The draft Biodiversity Action Plan is only recently published, and biodiversity is treated as a discrete topic in the environmental strategy and not integrated as a consideration into action plans for other services, for example grounds maintenance. The recent improvements in grounds maintenance practice referred to above have concentrated on implementing changes by working with contractors, aimed at specific and practical measures which contribute to biodiversity outcomes. Examples of good practice include building habitat shelters, mulching tree waste, conservation management of a small number of roadside verges and creating wildlife corridors around managed land. The Council is also preparing a management plan for water meadows that it owns at St Faiths Meadow and building biodiversity into its proposals for the major development area west of Waterlooville, though both projects are in their very early stages. The Council is a partner in the Hampshire Downs Management Programme. But taken overall, and despite recent improvement, the Council is missing opportunities to improve local biodiversity.
- 55 Although stakeholders consider that the Local Plan is protecting natural resources - for example through environmental appraisal, sensitive land allocations and landscape/nature conservation policies - the Council does not yet have monitoring arrangements in place to demonstrate this. It cannot, for example, show impacts through quality of life indicators.
- 56 There are nevertheless some positive aspects of the Council's approach to environmental protection and enhancement. Public satisfaction with waste collection is comparable with that of the best 25 per cent of councils and satisfaction with recycling is above average (2003/04). There is a good distribution of bring sites. All households have kerbside recycling facilities for paper, plastics and glass; and collection methods do reflect local circumstances, with back door collection and bags available where they are required. The Council's AWC pilot has proved very successful, in terms of increasing recycling rates and reducing the amount of waste collected; and it has been very well-received overall by local people in the trial area. The Council is starting to address waste minimisation through the Project Integra Behavioural Change Programme, waste collected per head is better (lower) than average, and waste growth has been static or reducing for the last three years. These positive aspects provide a sound basis for further improvement.
- 57 The Council has responded effectively to problems of poor air quality in the centre of Winchester. It has produced an Air Quality Management Strategy and an Air Quality Action Plan, the first in Hampshire. This uses a range of traffic management and sustainable transport solutions to reduce traffic pollution and improve air quality. Although the strategy was only recently approved and it is too early to show outcomes, it shows that the Council is taking action now to secure environmental improvements in the future.

### **Sustainable communities**

- 58 Overall, the Council is making good progress towards developing sustainable communities.
- 59 The Council has produced an up to date draft local plan, which embodies sustainability and biodiversity principles. The draft 2003 plan will replace the plan adopted in 1999 and this has now been tested at a local inquiry. The local plan inquiry inspectors support the sustainable principles upon which the draft plan is based, and accept the need for urban extensions onto green-field land west of Waterlooville and north of Winchester.
- 60 At the time of our original inspection we noted that the plan acknowledges the importance of energy saving in design and makes policy provision for sustainable energy schemes, but that the Council's design guidance focused on aesthetic issues and did not address sustainable design issues such as low energy design, water use, and use of sustainable or re-used materials. Since then the Council has completed a major project to address low energy design, having commissioned a thorough review of the issue from consultants. It has used the recommendations and learning from that work as a basis for negotiating with one of the prospective developers of the Waterlooville west site to adopt a new approach to site design, and has started similar discussions with the second developer. Establishing such principles as the basis for major site design lays good foundations for creating a more sustainable urban extension. However, it represents only one aspect of the various issues that ought to be addressed in future developments generally. These are potential topics for supplementary planning guidance, but the Council does not yet have such guidance available.
- 61 The Council has achieved good outcomes as a result of its new planning policies. Councillors have applied the principles of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3 to achieve a number of high density schemes, particularly in sustainable locations such as Winchester city centre. The Council can demonstrate a significant shift from larger to smaller dwellings and an increase in overall housing densities. Housing completion rates are increasing, and the Council has shown that it can overcome difficulties delivering dwelling numbers to meet structure plan requirements.
- 62 The Council is still meeting the government's target of achieving 60 per cent of new development on 'brownfield' sites. Although the proportion of 'brownfield' development has fallen slightly to 72 per cent, this reflects strategic planning policy and the need to locate some larger new developments on greenfield sites to meet strategic housing requirements, rather than any failure by the Council to give priority to brownfield development.

- 63 The Council is planning actively for more sustainable communities. It is meeting deadlines for producing its Local Development Framework. This is good progress, since it has been dealing with the inquiry and pre-adoption stages of the local plan review at the same time, and it provides an early opportunity to review sustainability guidance. There are also regeneration proposals in the pipeline which support traffic reduction and effective use of land in sustainable locations, for example the Silver Hill redevelopment in Winchester. This shows that the Council is using its planning powers now to produce sustainable outcomes in the future.
- 64 Although the Council is not a highway authority, it has provided effective support to the County Council on sustainable transport initiatives, particularly in the city of Winchester. The Council supports the quality bus partnership and funds the park and ride scheme from car parking income. It has restructured car parking provision to move long term parking away from the town centre to the park and ride site on the south of the city. It supports a rural dial a ride service and it has participated in a number of sustainable transport pilot schemes in the city as part of the EU 'Miracles' programme, for example a successful rent-a-bike scheme. The park and ride scheme has been particularly successful in reducing the number of car-borne commuter trips to the town centre. The Council has introduced dual fuel LPG vehicles for its own small fleet of vehicles. This has limited impact overall, but it sets a good example.
- 65 The Council has been active on other environmental health issues. It runs a number of joint health programmes, aimed at the elderly for example. It has achieved a good score against the Environmental Health checklist of best practice. The Council has produced a contaminated land strategy which sets out a programme of risk assessment and action planning through to 2006 and it is up to date with this programme of work.
- 66 Winchester has very good quality reception facilities at the main council offices and at its planning office. These are attractive and well equipped with IT facilities. Staff are knowledgeable and helpful. The reception areas are open from 8am to 6pm to cater for customers who cannot attend during the working day. The newly established customer care centre is handling an increasing proportion of enquiries and has been well received by the public, though staffing problems have led to poor response times when workload is high. The website is clear and provides a wide range of information including the opportunity for a variety of transactions. For example, it is possible to make a range of payments online or submit a planning application. Provided the call centre teething problems can be resolved, these facilities provide a good foundation for effective customer care. Good customer access to services is an important component of a sustainable community.

- 67 However, the Council does not fully recognise the diversity of its population in its approach to community engagement and community planning. The Council consults actively on individual projects, for example the Winchester air quality management proposals or the Land West of Waterlooville MDA, but its approach is otherwise focused at a district wide level, particularly through the Citizen's Panel. It has not engaged at a community level and it has a limited understanding of local community perspectives. It has not, for example, used its powerful GIS system outside the planning service to map community characteristics. There is evidence of this weakness in the recent dissatisfaction over council services in Whiteley and the need to establish a new consultation forum there. This has significant implications for the development of sustainable communities, because of the clear distinctions between the interests of the city of Winchester, the rural area and the growing communities to the south of the district on the fringes of the Solent conurbation.
- 68 Face to face access to services is also focused on the council offices in the city of Winchester. Although the Council provides benefits and housing surgeries in the southern parishes and it has plans for shared facilities with Alresford Town Council, it does not yet have more general arrangements with town or parish councils to provide facilities for face to face contact in the rural area. Again, this is significant because Winchester is situated in the north western corner of the district whereas population is growing most rapidly in the south. It takes 45 minutes to get between the two by car, and public transport links are poor.

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

- 69 Value for money is mixed in the services contributing to a sustainable environment. These costs include day-to-day operational elements of service provision as well as expenditure specifically directed at building a sustainable environment. There have been no significant examples of the Council moving resources to improve sustainability outcomes and improve value for money in this area, until the recent decision to introduce alternate weekly waste collection district-wide.
- 70 Waste management costs are high (at £49.04 per household in 2004/05, among the 25 per cent most expensive councils) and the service is achieving only average levels of recycling, though customer satisfaction is good. Waste volume per head is slightly lower than average and so is not an abnormal cost factor. The rural nature of the area does increase collection costs, but comparisons with 'nearest neighbour' councils also show higher than average costs (top third of councils by cost per head). The latest (unaudited) data shows that the cost increased to £57 per household in 2005/06. The Council argues that investment in the AWC pilot in 2004/05 and in 2005/06 was an abnormal cost factor, though costs in 2004/05 were not in fact significantly higher than in the previous year. The waste management service does not offer strong value for money.

- 71 Compared to other district councils, the planning service is expensive in terms of the cost per head of population and development control performance is weak. Planning costs in 2004/05 place Winchester in the top 10 per cent of councils. However, the Council is dealing with a sensitive historic city and significant levels of growth. It is also investing in development control improvements (from £570,000 PDG received in 2004/05) and it is handling the final stages of local plan preparation while starting work on the local development framework. The number of planning applications dealt with by Winchester (2794 in 2004/05) is also close to the top 10 per cent of Councils. These factors help to explain Winchester's higher costs, but it still provides a slow service for customers.
- 72 Street cleaning costs are less than average for other district councils, yet the Council achieves good performance against BVPI 199 (cleanliness) and customer satisfaction is good. The Council has reorganised the service to provide better integration of cleansing and maintenance schedules and provide a better service for the same expenditure. Despite the sustainability weaknesses identified above, this represents good value for money overall.
- 73 The environment health service has average costs compared to other district councils, though higher than average costs compared to 'nearest neighbour' councils. The Council achieves high scores against the Checklist of Environmental Health Best Practice; it is active in partnerships to promote health education and in work on air quality management. It provides value for money.
- 74 The Council has mechanisms to encourage value for money services, but it is not clear that these have improved value for money in the environmental and planning services. The Council employs a procurement officer jointly with another Hampshire district and it is currently reviewing its procurement strategy to provide a more flexible assessment of value for money and sustainable purchasing. There are, however, no outcomes from this work as yet and the sustainability strategy observes that the Council often adopts a short term approach to costs and values. The Council has undertaken a best value review of services contributing to a 'high quality environment', but this did not include actions specifically aimed at improving value for money (apart from the service integration referred to above) and it did not include value for money targets. The Council does not have any local value for money indicators and there is limited evidence of benchmarking on cost outside the environmental health service.
- 75 Until recently, the Council could demonstrate only limited examples of moving resources to improve sustainability outcomes. At the time of our original inspection, examples of moving resources included subsidising the introduction of low emission buses for the park and ride scheme, and wildflower hay cutting in the grounds maintenance service (which costs more than a normal mowing regime). But the Council had not challenged the costs (since the original competitive tenders) or the sustainability component of the major services provided under long-term contracts, such as waste collection, cleansing and grounds maintenance.

- 76 However, a key decision in the past six months indicates a changed approach that links cost and outcomes, and moves resources to invest in changes that will lead to improved outcomes - and thus better value for money. This decision relates to the extension of the AWC system district-wide. The pilot has helped the Council and its contractor understand fully the practical issues involved, thereby minimising commercial risks, and enabling the Council to negotiate a much-reduced price than originally proposed by the contractor. In addition, the Council has been able to use the opportunity of contract negotiation to agree a recycling scheme for its own offices at no additional cost.

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

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

- 77 At the time of our original inspection, there were important weaknesses in the Council's track record on sustainability. But there have been some significant improvements in the past six months. The Council did not achieve its recycling targets in 2004/05 or 2005/06, and performance on some sustainability-related indicators has declined, but the AWC pilot has led to significant recycling and related improvements in the trial area. There has also been a strong focus on traffic reduction and there are some positive signs for the future such as the Council's action at St. Faith's Meadow and on air quality. The Council has shown it can deliver customer-related improvements in its new Customer Service Centre arrangements. Sustainability had not been integrated into day-to-day working, but the need for this is at the heart of recent changes in relation to the role of the Senior Managers Group (SMG) discussed later.
- 78 The Council has a cautious approach to change. This is reflected in the recent Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) peer review, which concluded that the Council is risk averse and slow to make decisions. It recommended that the Council should encourage a climate of ambition and more appropriate risk-taking.
- 79 This cautious approach was reflected in the Council's approach to recycling. The Council was late to decide how to increase recycling rates. Performance declined slightly between 2003/04 and 2004/05 and is only slightly improved on 2002/03, and the Council had not achieved its own targets in 2003/04 or 2004/05. Over this period, most councils have improved their recycling performance significantly. The Council delayed action to address this under-performance because of adverse media coverage of a neighbouring council's AWC scheme, whereas other Hampshire councils drew lessons from successful schemes elsewhere and implemented their AWC proposals anyway. This left Winchester's performance further behind that of most Hampshire districts, and of best performing councils nationally. The Council also had a poor record on composting, until the AWC pilot started to collect green waste separately in the trial area. The Council's caution led to the decision to conduct a year-long AWC pilot. This has ultimately proved beneficial in that there is now all-party support for extending the system district-wide, clear public acceptance of the benefits of the system, and the Council was in a stronger position to negotiate a good contract price for the change. Nonetheless, recycling has been a priority for the Council for a long period, and its slow progress in this area shows how delay can undermine its ability to improve difficult sustainability problems, even where these are priorities.

### 30 Sustainable Environment | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 80 The Council cannot show consistent improvement in its performance against other sustainability related national performance indicators. For example, the percentage of electronic interactions with the public has deteriorated. Performance on street cleansing has improved, however, and the weight of waste collected per head has remained constant and in the past year decreased. The Council's track record on these performance indicators shows that although sustainability has been a priority for the Council, it has not been able to deliver improvements in performance across services. Customers cannot be sure that sustainability is in fact a clear priority for the Council, when set against other priorities.
- 81 Sustainability has not been integrated into day-to-day working. Clear outcomes on sustainability are limited, as most action is still at the planning stage. For example, the Council cannot show that Green Travel Plans have led to employees changing their mode of transport, or (until recently) that the planning process has been used to persuade builders to incorporate sustainable design features into new buildings, for example, by using solar panels or energy saving measures.
- 82 Nevertheless, there has been a long standing focus on traffic reduction - the Winchester Movement and Access Plan originated in 1991 and the Council has continued to press for park and ride provision. In conjunction with the County Council, it reduced traffic speeds and took action to control parking in the city. It has changed the habits of some commuters - around 800 use the park and ride instead of looking for parking within Winchester, which lessens air pollution.
- 83 The very recent track record is much more encouraging. The Council has acquired St. Faith's Meadow and plans to develop it as an amenity for the public, and it is the first Hampshire district council to develop an Air Quality Action Plan. The Council also secured very positive results from its AWC pilot which ran until the end of 2005. The recycling and composting rate in the pilot area was 38 per cent (and would be in the region of 40 per cent if adjusted to take account of the glass disposed of at bring sites by residents - which has increased) - which compares to 17.2 per cent in the area before the trial, and a district-wide rate of 20.2 per cent in 2005/06. This shows the Council's ability to work with its contractor to achieve better sustainability. Also, as noted earlier, there has been important progress in the past six months in negotiations about the planned new development west of Waterlooville.
- 84 Local people are generally satisfied with most of Winchester City Council's environmental services. Over the last two surveys in 2000 and 2003, the proportion of the population satisfied with waste collection and standards of cleanliness was in the best 25 per cent of councils nationally, though it has declined. The proportion of the population satisfied with recycling is above average though, again, it has declined. Satisfaction with service received in planning is, however, among the worst 25 per cent of councils and it had deteriorated since 2000.

- 85 Value for money in some environmental services has improved over time. The Council has re-organised grounds maintenance and street cleansing services so that they are more integrated, with a more focused team approach. As a result the overall appearance of the district has improved. Also, as noted earlier, the recent decision to extend the AWC pilot district-wide marks an important change of approach to value for money issues.
- 86 The Council has increased its capacity to improve and make changes since CPA. It has gained experience of corporate project working, for example building a Customer Service Centre, which has had positive customer feedback. It has also made progress with modernisation, publishing a community strategy and developing its corporate planning and budgeting processes. It has also made progress on project management, procurement and risk management. The Council has restructured at senior level to help it act more strategically and efficiently. This has released £150,000 for front-line services. This progress is recognised in the 2005 IDeA assessment, which concludes that Winchester is a council that knows where it is going and is now in a good place to rapidly progress and improve. It is also reflected in the Commission's recent inspection report on health partnerships which concludes that the Council has promising prospects for improvement. This shows that the Council is capable of tackling difficult corporate issues and that it is acquiring change management skills that it can apply more widely.

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

- 87 The Council's overall approach to sustainability is now much clearer than it was at the time of the earlier inspection work, although its planning and performance management has not yet secured consistent sustainable service delivery. The Council lacks a comprehensive vision for sustainability, it has not determined sustainability's relative priority, and it has not - until recent changes - established effective leadership in this area. It has a range of plans that do address sustainability issues in different areas of the Council's business, but they are incomplete and they are not joined up across services. It has not maximised opportunities to lead by example on sustainability or to research best sustainable practice in service delivery. Importantly, the Council does not have performance indicators to measure the success of its plans. However, it does now have a sustainability strategy to help it to develop sustainable practices within the Council. It has also in the past few months made clear to its Senior Managers Group the expectation that individually and collectively they should focus efforts on taking forward the sustainability agenda. The Council has a clear performance management framework which it can extend to include sustainability indicators, to support this management focus. It has also introduced new mechanisms to share knowledge within the Council.

## 32 Sustainable Environment | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 88 The Council and its partners in the Local Strategic Partnership do not have a comprehensive vision for sustainability. The Community Strategy 2004 - 2014 outlines certain themes such as access, transport, waste and recycling, and contains related indicators; but is not comprehensive. However, the Council has changed its approach since CPA to become more effective as a community leader, and this change has strengthened over the past year. It has become more actively involved in strategic sub-regional issues that affect the district, and has started to take a much wider-ranging view of its role. This has contributed to councillors realising that the Council's role is wider than mere service delivery, and that delivering this wider role effectively depends on consensus with its partners about longer-term objectives.
- 89 At the time of the original inspection the Council's sustainability value ('acts in a sustainable way and encourages others to do likewise') meant that the idea was a strand of thinking in its priorities - but the Council had no single or clear statement setting out what sustainability meant it or its partners in any detail. The priority of sustainability was only partially explained by the Green Agenda in the Council's 2005 - 2008 corporate priorities. However, the Corporate Strategy 2006-2009 (approved in March 2006) now makes clearer reference to the overall green agenda objective and to component aspects of sustainability such as biodiversity. In addition, the Council has now developed some key projects with a clear sustainability theme at their core and various managerial initiatives to ensure it lives that value. The Council's plans include: significantly increasing recycling and reducing landfill; working with partners to increase local communities' pride in where they live; working with the County Council to promoting more sustainable transport and park and ride, and to improve the condition and safety of roads and pavements; reducing the energy demands of new development; and implementing the Biodiversity Action Plan and Carbon Management Strategy. However, there is further work to do to develop the approach so that the Council, its partners and local people have a clear, more rounded and shared sense of what sustainable development priorities the Council is focusing on, and what outcomes are intended for the district, as well as to address important issues such as energy efficiency measures in housing.

- 90 Leadership on sustainability has not been effective until recently, but is improving. At the time of our original inspection there were differing opinions at managerial and councillor level about what it means and how important it is. Neither had leadership on sustainability been demonstrated through the Council's decision making. When making investment decisions the Council has not worked out where sustainability sits in relation to issues such as saving money or meeting the concerns of local businesses. It has little experience of whole life costing. However, recent decisions to proceed with the AWC system and to adopt the Carbon Management Strategy are based on cross-party recognition of the need to make significant changes in approach to deliver more sustainable service delivery improvement, and that these changes might involve additional costs at least in the short term. Nonetheless, the Council has not explicitly determined how important sustainability is in relation to the other issues it has to address, such as council tax levels or short-term performance gains. Work on identifying non-priorities is also in its early stages. Given the Council's limited revenue resources, this means a lack of clarity about the relative importance of sustainability and how it will figure in the Council's future plans.
- 91 The Council has a range of plans which address sustainability in some way but most are recently adopted and at an early stage in their implementation, or still under development. Appendix 1 sets out the current plans and strategies and illustrates this point, but also makes clear the progress that has been made in the past six months. Significant plans include the Sustainability Strategy which identifies the right improvements in the council's internal practices; the Carbon Management Plan aimed at reducing the Council's energy use; the Environmental Strategy; the Biodiversity Action Plan; the Air Quality Action Plan; and plans for a new park and ride facility. The Council does not have a climate change strategy, although this was planned for January 2006. Plans do not cross refer. They also vary in the extent to which they are resourced or detailed in terms of timescales or responsibilities, but for the most part they are not fully developed or resourced. This makes it difficult for the Council to say what it needs to do, what it will cost and whether its plans are achievable.

### 34 Sustainable Environment | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 92 Due to lack of clarity about its priority, sustainability is as yet only partially embedded in council structures and planning processes, while to date the Council has not maximised opportunities to lead by example on sustainability. For example, it has not until recently built biodiversity considerations or wildflower conservation into its programme of grass verge cutting<sup>2</sup>. It lacks comprehensive plans for environmental enforcement and education, for example on fly-tipping or litter, or for waste minimisation. As a result, the Council is focusing resources on removing fly tips when it could have prevented them from happening in the first place. Action on sustainability has not been greatly evidenced in street cleaning, although steps are being taken now to build in biodiversity improvements. This failure to lead by example is not sending out the right messages to the public, while the lack of clarity about sustainability's priority represents a risk of duplicating action or missing opportunities.
- 93 The Council does not have a full picture of users' needs. It has not yet fully engaged with users in business planning, and it does not corporately coordinate the use of the Citizens Panel. It has not mapped local need using demographic data and the GIS. This is important if the Council is to meet the needs of diverse local communities and enable people to access services more locally. It is in the early stages of engagement with hard to reach groups. It is working with Community Action Hampshire to identify who these groups might be - for example, migrant worker groups in the food industry - but it has not reached the point of appropriately tailoring its service delivery.
- 94 Research into best practice on sustainability in individual services has been limited. Services have instead networked particularly with other Hampshire councils on day-to-day service issues. The Council is a member of Project Integra but it has not used the shared knowledge of this group to become a leader in recycling.
- 95 Performance monitoring arrangements are not in place to measure sustainability outcomes. Although the Council has developed its corporate performance management arrangements, it has not identified quality of life/sustainability indicators which reflect sustainability across the board. Staff appraisals do not routinely include discussion of how the individual post holder can contribute to the Council's wider sustainability aims. There is also a lack of trend analysis on the current range of indicators and a lack of evidence of timely remedial action. Some councillors felt that they were not given information on the background to performance, which limits their ability to ask the right questions and tackle performance problems. Without these mechanisms, the Council cannot understand its performance and drive improvement.

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<sup>2</sup> Highways verges are mostly cut by the Council acting as agents for Hampshire CC, the highway authority. The County Council has not yet prepared its Roadside Verge Management Action Plan, so the Council is constrained in terms of its ability to alter management regimes to protect or promote nature conservation. However, the Council is currently taking action to manage ten sites (covering 63,185 square metres) which provide an important habitat for wild flowers, and identifying such areas is now an ongoing process.

- 96 However, the Council does have a clear performance framework, which it is in the processing of embedding. Any new strategies such as the Sustainability Strategy are to be integrated into future business planning. There have been some recent enhancements such as the 'dashboards' - a selection of key indicators represented graphically, which is being introduced with all service managers. The Council is also beginning to use the results-based accountability approach to help define the outcomes it desires from cross-cutting agendas. This will help the Council move away from a concern with process and activity, and also to help service units to see how their work can contribute to wider agendas. However, at this stage, much more work is needed to develop this approach, particularly in terms of defining intended targets, and indicators or measures of success. Other improvements are planned, such as more comprehensive detailing of resources in business plans to bring financial and business planning and reporting systems closer together.
- 97 The Sustainability Strategy identifies many of the right actions for the Council to become more sustainable and addresses some of the weaknesses. For example, it aims to raise awareness, measure impacts and establish guiding principles, including use of resources and travelling. The strategy has no specific budget, but it is intended to be effective by modifying core programmes and activities. There have also been weaknesses until recently in terms of capacity to support the strategy, which we discuss later. Nevertheless, the strategy is an important step forward for the Council.
- 98 The Council has clear targets and arrangements for managing value for money. It plans to save £600,000 in the 2006/07 financial year through a mix of service level and corporate measures. These include Customer Service Centre efficiencies, e-government savings and other projects such as e-procurement. The Council proposes to carry out business process mapping and organisational development within services in order to streamline provision and improve efficiency.
- 99 The Council can show learning from customer comments and complaints. There are positive examples in Environmental Health - for example, responding to customer feedback by providing information about recycling after confusion about which materials could be recycled. Multiple comments on tree maintenance have led to a tree survey and a draft Tree Strategy. Grounds maintenance complaints led to an internal audit report and changes in the arrangements with the contractor.
- 100 The Council has introduced new mechanisms to transfer learning at corporate level. Senior managers now meet regularly with a strategic agenda, and the Council has initiated a regular managers' conference to share knowledge at management level. It has introduced team briefings to improve communication within the organisation. The new project management approach includes systematic evaluation, which will help the Council record its learning from projects.

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

- 101** The Council is now beginning to demonstrate a clearer capacity to improve, and its overall approach to and thinking about sustainability is now clearer than it was at the time of the earlier inspection work, particularly at councillor level. Responsibilities for sustainability and environmental management have become much better defined at officer level, as a result of restructuring and role change which has increased capacity at the centre of the organisation to tackle strategic issues. The Council works proactively with partners to improve its capacity, and following a recent review has identified areas in which it can strengthen its approach. Skills and training are available, and the Council has put project planning and corporate planning systems in place. It is improving its procurement practices and gains capacity from working in partnership. It has financial reserves but revenue resources are stretched. Information technology (IT) is not used to support the Council's approach to sustainability.
- 102** At the time of our original inspection, responsibilities for sustainability and environmental management were not clear. The Sustainability Strategy was supported by a Sustainability Group made up of officers of different services and levels within the Council, but this was a recent development and there was no evidence of any clear outcomes. The role of sustainability champion at councillor or senior manager level was not apparent to officers or members, nor was there any overview or co-ordination of the different plans. This meant that the sustainability agenda was not properly owned within the Council from the point of view of performance improvement or co-ordination.
- 103** The Council is now revising its corporate management approach. The intention is that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) develops a more corporate and strategic role, and the wider Senior Managers Group (SMG) becomes responsible for leading the delivery of cross-cutting initiatives as well as service delivery. This revised approach - especially the changed role for CMT - is helping the Council to focus on the need to set and enable a clearer strategic direction, and is helping councillors to reshape their own thinking about their role. The wider SMG role is intended to focus particularly on taking forward the sustainable development agenda, and aims to ensure that all senior managers contribute to this and to help them be more innovative.

- 104** However, this recent change has still to be completed, and the detailed split of responsibilities and practicalities has yet to be worked up. Several key issues remain to be resolved. The Council has not yet defined precisely what SMG should be aiming to achieve, and how CMT should facilitate this. It has not yet resolved how to ensure senior managers have the capacity to deliver sustainability work (as opposed to developing the ideas and initiatives) while maintaining their existing service responsibilities. It is not yet clear about the need for or extent of supporting resource to research, develop and implement some types of project, or the role of the sustainability officer in this context; nor has it considered the balance of effort needed in future between further policy development and project implementation. Some managers are also concerned about whether the person responsible for delivering a project outside their service management remit will have the authority or expertise to deliver. The need for appropriate project management arrangements is also potentially important, given the potential complexity of progressing cross-cutting issues. The new arrangements offer the potential for all senior managers to contribute to meeting the Council's sustainability agenda, but their effectiveness will depend on resolving these important practical issues.
- 105** Councillors' overall approach to sustainability is now clearer than it was at the time of the earlier inspection work, although there is still no common understanding of what sustainability is or specifically how it is to be addressed in a Winchester context. Sustainable development issues have a higher priority in terms of political awareness. This has developed due to a growing realisation that such issues cannot be separated from the strategic and key service delivery issues the Council faces - for example, the scale and location of new housing, how housing needs relate to economic and transport issues, how planning for new communities can enrich Winchester district as a whole, and the waste management/recycling agenda. In tandem with this growing political awareness is a realisation that addressing the issues relates strongly to the Council's wider community role of leading by example. However, councillors' roles in developing sustainability policy are not clear and there is no councillor group which owns the sustainability strategy, which restricts action at the political level.

- 106** The Council has recently re-organised the scrutiny function by aligning the scrutiny panels directly to the Cabinet portfolios, with some cross-cutting panels for specific topics, and this is a significant improvement on past practice. The alignment of scrutiny panels with portfolios has two purposes. First, it aims to encourage Portfolio Holders' accountability, and scrutiny panels are now more actively engaged in assessing performance. Second, it allows scrutiny panels to focus on wider agendas than was the case with the previous focus on services. The division of responsibility across environment, social issues and economy could potentially be unhelpful in terms of the sustainable development agenda if operated in an inflexible manner, and some councillors feel that this has detracted from the Council's policy making capacity. However, the Council has set up informal scrutiny groups (known as officer/member groups - IMOGs) which are task and finish investigative groups intended for policy development. These have been used effectively to consider topics such as the LSP, partnership working and community engagement, as well as particular issues that have been helpful in revising policy, such as open spaces. Although there is no specific group for sustainable environment, this approach demonstrates the Council's recognition of the importance of a flexible approach to scrutiny work when dealing with wider-ranging issues, and of councillors developing expertise in that role. It provides a basis for imaginative approaches to using scrutiny to support policy development in areas that depend for success on long-term political consensus.
- 107** The latest available survey data indicates that there is no consistent or widespread understanding in the Council of what sustainability is. In the 2005 staff survey, 44 per cent of respondents were unclear how sustainability related to their work. This is a barrier to improvement. The Council – together with its LSP partners – has not yet evaluated current plans and strategies to ensure that sustainability is embedded, and implement routine sustainability appraisal in decision making. Doing so systematically - and tracking this approach through staff appraisal, the performance management system and scrutiny - would help the Council ensure that its plans and practices were aligned to support the sustainability priority. It would also help to improve staff and partner understanding of the agenda.
- 108** The Council's financial capacity to deliver sustainability is currently uncertain. It has reserves, but revenue resources are stretched. There is a limited record of attracting external funding, though the Council secured £250,000 from DEFRA for its recycling pilot. It has a medium term financial forecast but that does not show how the Council is going to balance its resources to address its priorities. This means that resources for future sustainability improvements are unsure.
- 109** The Council is not making full use of its IT capacity to promote sustainability. It has a GIS system which is used mainly by planners, but use of it could be extended across the Council. For example, it could be used to help map needs within the area, and to inform LSP decision making about service provision.

- 110** However, skills and training to deliver improvement are available. The Council has a partial workforce plan and a corporate training plan. The 2005 staff survey shows that 75 per cent of respondents felt they were valued and 63 per cent felt that there was a commitment to developing staff. Recently human resources capacity has improved as sickness absence has reduced council-wide.
- 111** Project management structures have been rolled out over the last two years, and the Council is now embedding formal cost-benefit analysis and evaluation techniques. It has combined projects into a corporate programme which includes new office accommodation and local area service provision starting with the pilot at Alresford. The Council is planning to buy performance monitoring software which it hopes will embed project management and performance practices.
- 112** The Council is in the process of improving its corporate planning systems. It has started to implement an outcomes framework with its Community Strategy partners, which specifies outcomes and maps out action to reach the desired goal. It plans to apply this approach to the corporate plan. Consultation on the LDF/Statement of Community involvement, the Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan will be integrated in future and the Council started this process with workshops in autumn 2005.
- 113** The Council works proactively with partners to improve its capacity. It has obtained some benefits in terms of consultancy support from its successful bid with the Carbon Trust to develop its Carbon Management Strategy work, which will improve the energy efficiency of its buildings. The partnership with Winchester Litter Pickers adds to street cleanliness as they clear up their own streets, and litter pick in hotspots and after major events. The Council has also worked with Hampshire County Council in experiments to promote sustainable vehicles to the public, such as dual fuel buses from the park and ride facility. To build on this work, the Council has recently reviewed its approach to partnership, and identified a number of areas for improvement which are set out in an action plan.
- 114** The Council is in the early stages of implementing joint procurement with neighbouring councils, and it recognises that joint contracts can provide economies. It shares a procurement officer with Eastleigh Borough Council. It has a new approach to the procurement strategy which has led to some economies through bulk purchasing and should do so from e-procurement in the near future. It does not base purchasing decisions purely on cost, but applies a 60 per cent quality:40 per cent cost ratio. This shows an awareness of broader purchasing considerations and provides a platform for sustainable purchasing.
- 115** Finally, plans are well advanced for the implementation of the AWC scheme district-wide. The Council has agreed its roll out plans, resources are in place to implement the scheme and there is a political consensus on the way forward. Results from the pilot suggest that the scheme will produce high recycling levels that will make up lost ground and re-establish Winchester as a good performer in this area.

## Appendix 1 – Current position with sustainability improvement plans and proposals

Issue <sup>3</sup>	Improvement proposal	Position at time of original inspection	Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection
<b>General</b>			
Raising corporate awareness of sustainability	Training programme		Conference held November 2005. Environment team away day (with partners) April 2006.
Embedding sustainability in service planning across services	Service planning guidance	Limited evidence of systematic change in approach to sustainable environment issues within services.	Revised approach to roles and responsibilities of Corporate Management Team and Senior Managers Group - SMG charged with taking forward the sustainability agenda at service level and on a cross-cutting basis.
Make all decisions more sustainable	Development checklist to evaluate sustainability of decisions	Work in progress, but checklist not implemented.	

<sup>3</sup> Issues drawn from Council's own plans and strategies (see table 2) and from the first section of this report.

Issue	Improvement proposal	Position at time of original inspection	Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection
Few performance indicators to measure sustainability performance	Proposal to identify indicators	Work in progress, but indicators not identified.	
Lack of external challenge in service planning	No proposals	-	
<b>Sustainable consumption and production</b>			
Encouraging sustainable procurement	Procurement Strategy being revised	Work in progress – resource implications unclear.	As part of AWC roll out, bins and bags procurement to take account of sustainability of production and producers, as well as cost.  Council taking part in joint NHS/local government project to encourage more sustainable approach to major procurement schemes (including buildings).

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Issue	Improvement proposal	Position at time of original inspection	Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection
<b>Climate change</b>			
Tackling Climate Change	Prepare Climate Change Strategy	To be prepared by January 2006.	
Reduce Carbon Emissions as a result of the Council's own operations	Consultancy from Carbon Trust leading to action plan.	Consultancy funded and under way - but no decision yet on action points or resource implications.	Council agreed Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan March 2006, and implementation phase now started.
Reduce emissions from journey to work and work travel	Green Travel Plan	Progress stalled.	
<b>Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement</b>			
Improving air quality in Winchester City	Air Quality management Action Plan	Plan approved and in place - though many concrete proposals remain to be worked up and resourced.	

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Improvement proposal</b>	<b>Position at time of original inspection</b>	<b>Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection</b>
Improve waste management - recycling below target	Introduce alternate weekly collection of recyclables and residual waste	Twelve month pilot programme successfully implemented, but no final decision yet on roll out.	Council agreed February 2006 to roll out district-wide in two phases, in November 2006 and July 2007, each preceded by a comprehensive programme of awareness raising for householders with follow-up support. The scheme is fully costed and resourced, and has all-party political support. The Council and its contractor have given careful consideration to the timing of the roll-out, to ensure both have capacity to do so without risk of problems.

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Issue	Improvement proposal	Position at time of original inspection	Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection
Encourage waste minimisation and re-use		Talks to groups and schools - including waste minimisation. Home composting widely promoted.	Introduction of AWC will be linked to provision of a garden waste collection service to all householders - green waste will then be composted, and used for grounds maintenance. Council has used AWC contract negotiation to agree a recycling scheme for its own offices at no additional cost. As part of Project Integra, application to WRAP for funding to promote behavioural change to encourage waste reduction, reuse and recycling of waste.
Addressing contaminated land issues	Contaminated land strategy	Strategy approved and programme of work under way.	
Setting an example on litter and fly tipping by publicity and enforcement	No proposals		

Issue	Improvement proposal	Position at time of original inspection	Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection
Encouraging biodiversity	Biodiversity action plan	Plan being prepared for Natural Environment Forum. Early draft available - but not yet approved. Resource implications undetermined.	Biodiversity Action Plan consultation draft approved and published November 2005. Steps taken to integrate biodiversity approach into street scene and grounds maintenance work, by changed working practices.
<b>Sustainable communities</b>			
Improving engagement at a community level	Preparation of local community strategies to draw issues together at a community level	Discussion stage.	
Improve access to services for people living outside Winchester	Pilot scheme with Alresford Town Council for local access point	Principle agreed and funding available for one pilot.	
Preparation of Local Development Framework – to encourage more sustainable forms of development	Local Development Scheme	Progress in accordance with local development scheme. Resources available.	

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<b>Issue</b>	<b>Improvement proposal</b>	<b>Position at time of original inspection</b>	<b>Changes/progress at time of follow-up inspection</b>
Providing more guidance on sustainable design	Use consultancy advice from Energy Trust	Consultancy not yet commissioned.	Consultancy report on energy implications of new development completed; and used to negotiate change of approach by prospective developers at the west of Waterloo MDA.