

Streetscene and Waste

Erewash Borough Council

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Service Inspection

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

Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater 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.

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

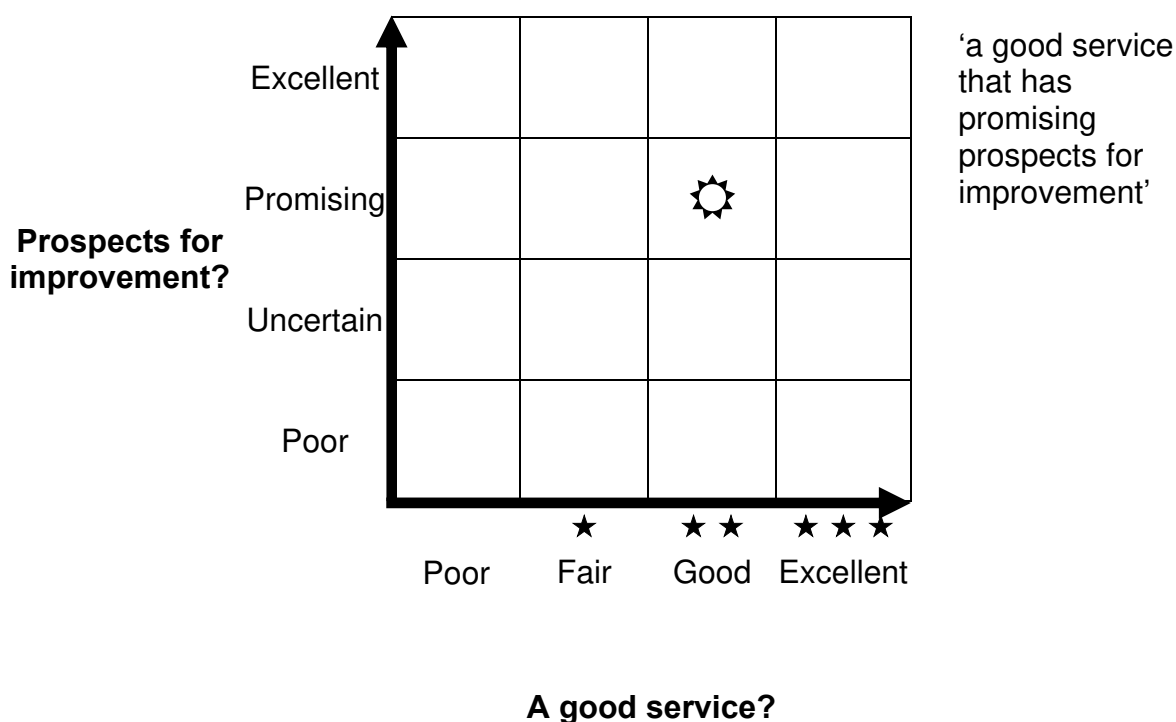
Summary

- 1 Erewash Borough Council is delivering good street scene and waste management services with promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The borough is clean and tidy and recycling rates match the best performing councils. A commitment to environmental improvement is a clear priority of the Council and it has supported this with significant investment in waste management and streetscene services. Performance in relation to recycling and street cleanliness is relatively strong, and the levels of waste collected and disposed of in landfill sites are reducing. A more disciplined approach to service management has enhanced the efficiency, quality and reliability of services. However, service users have not traditionally been involved in the design of services and there is a lack of focus on ensuring that local service standards are being achieved.
- 3 Changes in working practices and the introduction of initiatives such as the neighbourhood warden service have enhanced the quality and efficiency of services. Following a long period of instability there is now effective leadership of the service and capacity has been enhanced through internal investment and a reduction in sickness absence. The Council has started a best value review of Neighbourhood Services, although it is too early to say whether this will lead to improvements in the service. The Council has not set challenging targets for improving value for money, and it has not identified how user concerns over the 'green bag' recycling scheme will be addressed.

Scoring the service

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

Table 1 Scoring chart¹:



Source: Audit Commission

- 5 The service is a good, two-star service because:
- commitment to environmental improvement is identified as a clear priority and significant investment has been made to deliver improvement objectives;
 - performance in relation to recycling, composting and cleanliness is relatively strong;
 - the borough is clean and tidy, with parks and open areas well-maintained;
 - there is an active approach to enhancing services, such as the introduction of neighbourhood wardens and the Pride in Erewash initiative;

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

- the service is generally accessible to users and responsive to user needs;
- new equipment and revised working practices have improved the quality and reliability of the service;
- in 2005/06 there was a six per cent reduction in the amount of waste collected and a 20 per cent reduction in the amount buried in landfill sites; and
- historically poor value for money has started to be addressed. The cleansing service is high performing for relatively low cost, although waste collection, while also high performing, is high cost.

However,

- there has been limited engagement of users in establishing service standards and also limited monitoring to ensure that existing standards are being achieved;
- instances of graffiti and standards of grounds maintenance are a problem in certain areas of the borough; and
- local satisfaction with services has historically been poor, although it shows signs of improvement.

6 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- there is a recent track record of delivering improvements in service performance;
- the Council has implemented a range of changes that have led to improvements in service delivery;
- the Council has set challenging targets for service improvement that are supported by strengthened performance management arrangements;
- the Council works effectively with key partners; and
- there is effective leadership of the service.

However,

- the Council has not identified how it will address local concerns over the 'green bag' recycling scheme;
- challenging targets for improving value for money are not set;
- the cost and quality of services is not routinely monitored and targeted to match the best performing councils; and
- it is too early to identify whether the best value review will deliver service improvements.

Recommendations

- 7 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the council. In addition we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the council should do the following:

R1 Ensure the service is responsive to local needs by:

- *engaging users in the development of service standards;*
- *monitoring the service to ensure compliance with service standards; and*
- *publicising the performance achieved in relation to service standards.*

- 8 The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the service will be tailored to meet the identified needs of users; and
- the Council will be able to demonstrate to users the extent to which it is meeting their needs.

- 9 The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented in the next six months.

R2 Review and challenge value for money across neighbourhood services and set targets to improve efficiency by:

- *ensuring the best value review of Neighbourhood Services rigorously challenges services to match the cost and performance of the best performing councils;*
- *benchmarking of service cost and performance and establishing a baseline assessment of value for money;*
- *establishing comparative unit cost performance and quality data; and*
- *ensuring managers and Councillors consider cost information alongside performance information as part of the performance management of the service.*

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

- 10 The expected benefits of this recommendation are:
 - full understanding of the value for money provided by services;
 - improved targeting of actions to improve value for money in areas most in need of this improvement action;
 - improved value for money of services; and
 - ability to demonstrate value for money of the service to the public.
- 11 The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented in the next six months.

Report

Context

The locality

- 12 Erewash is a borough council in the south east of Derbyshire, between the cities of Derby and Nottingham, each of which are a focus for shopping, entertainment and employment. It is a largely rural area, but with the population centred in two market towns of Ilkeston and Long Eaton.
- 13 The population is around 110,000, with only 1.9 per cent from black and minority ethnic communities, much lower than the national or regional averages. Overall deprivation levels are about average, but there are localised pockets of deprivation and one ward, Ilkeston North, is one of the most deprived in England. This area has been given £1.6 million to spend over the next four years through the 'Safer Stronger Communities' Fund.
- 14 Unemployment is lower than regional and national averages at 1.5 per cent, by claimant count. There has been a decline in traditional coal mining and lace industries, with employment now largely engineering and textile/furniture manufacture, with some agricultural employment in the west of the borough.
- 15 Average wages are below regional and national levels, but house prices have risen much faster than regionally or nationally, so affordability of housing is a growing problem. There is also a growing shortfall in the number of affordable houses being built, across the borough.

The Council

- 16 The Council has, since May 2003, been under Conservative control - 27 of the 51 councillors are Conservative. There are also 21 Labour councillors, two Liberal Democrat councillors and one Independent councillor. Political management is through an eight person Council Executive, comprising the Council Leader and portfolio holders, all from the Conservative group.
- 17 There are two overview and scrutiny committees ('service effectiveness' and 'external affairs'). The latter is chaired by a Labour councillor.
- 18 The Council's budgets for 2005/06 are £13.12 million for revenue expenditure and £8.27 million for capital expenditure. The Council employs 417 (full-time equivalent) permanent staff, plus 259 casual staff, principally in leisure. It runs all its main services in-house. However, it transferred its housing stock to what is now Three Valleys Housing in 2002.

- 19 The Council was assessed as 'weak' within the corporate performance assessment (CPA) undertaken by the Audit Commission in December 2004. The progress assessment undertaken in December 2005 highlighted that the Council was making limited progress in addressing the issues identified in the CPA report and while it had improved poorly performing and priority services some significant weaknesses remained.

The Council's streetscene and waste management service

- 20 The Council has a statutory responsibility to collect household waste, meet minimum standards with respect to recycling and to keep the borough clean. Street cleaning, refuse and recycling collections and grounds maintenance are delivered directly by the Council (References in this report to the 'service' relate to this group of services). In 2005/06 the Council spent £6.01 million on these services.
- 21 We last inspected the street cleaning services in Erewash in 2001, when we judged the service provided by the Council as a fair, one-star, service which had uncertain prospects for improvement.

National context

- 22 Waste Disposal Authorities (WDAs) and Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) carry out waste management functions. Erewash Borough Council is the WCA and Derbyshire County Council is the WDA.
- 23 The Government has set objectives for local authorities to reduce the amount of waste that is collected and to encourage more recycling. Erewash's target for recycling and composting was 30 per cent for 2005/06. District and county councils are encouraged to work together to produce joint waste management strategies and to ensure that national policy can be delivered, including an absolute reduction in tonnages of biodegradable waste sent to landfill.
- 24 Councils have a duty to keep land clear of litter. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) gives a local authority power to deal with litter based problems affecting its area, including issuing fixed penalty tickets to people who commit an offence by dropping litter. A Code of Practice, issued under the act, recommends a 'clean as necessary' approach and specific minimum levels of cleanliness for various environments. Under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act an authority has the power to issue a notice to a private landowner to clean up their land and to undertake the cleansing itself if the landowner fails to act. The Clean Neighbourhoods Act (2003) strengthens a council's legislative powers for keeping the area clean.

- 25 The Government's Liveability agenda draws clear links between the quality of the local environment, health issues and crime and disorder. Legislation has been strengthened to help local councils improve the local environment such as increasing the amount for fixed penalty notices for people dropping litter, reducing times taken to remove abandoned vehicles and additional powers to tackle graffiti. In response to the Kyoto protocol, the Government set targets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent, from the 1990 baseline, by 2010. Guidelines have been provided for local councils on a range of other environmental issues, such as using recycled paper, increasing bio diversity and addressing climate change.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 26** The Council has clear and explicit aims for the service that address both local needs and national priorities. The community strategy, which sets out the broad vision of the Council and its key partners, identifies the following key priorities:
- a high quality street scene, free of litter and other environmental problems and extending the borough's warden scheme; and
 - to show, through audited inspection, that the quality of the local street scene is improving
- 27** This commitment is reinforced in the Council's Corporate Plan 2006-2009. This sets out the corporate vision as 'A clean, healthy, vibrant, safe and sustainable borough delivering the best for Erewash'. 'Protecting and enhancing our environment' is one of six priority themes. Seven objectives are listed under this theme, as follows:
- build citizenship and introduce Pride in Erewash through active community engagement;
 - improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Neighbourhood Services;
 - reduce the problems associated with environmental nuisance through education, engagement and enforcement;
 - improve the quality of our parks and open spaces;
 - continue to improve our Waste Management performance;
 - encourage better energy efficiency; and
 - monitor and manage our environment and our impact upon it.
- 28** The corporate plan sets some clear and challenging targets for the delivery of these objectives. For example, to recycle/compost 42 per cent of household waste in 2006/07 and respond to over 90 per cent of flytipping reports within one day.
- 29** Further clarity and detail of how corporate objectives will be delivered is contained in the Neighbourhood Services service plan which sets targets for the service that match the best performing councils. While these targets are challenging, they relate only to best value performance indicators (BVPIs). Local performance indicators are scheduled to be produced, in consultation with local people, by October 2006. Detailed service specifications are published for most aspects of the service, but the focus is on monitoring only those areas that relate to BVPIs. The Council cannot therefore currently demonstrate that it is responsive to customer needs across all aspects of the service.

- 30 There is strong political commitment to enhancing the local environment and this is the key priority of the Council leadership. This commitment is reflected in a significant investment in streetscene and waste management over the last two years. For example, £1.6 million has been allocated to fund new vehicles and equipment, the street cleansing budget has been increased by £200,000 to fund additional teams to target fly tipping and heavy littering, and £180,000 has been provided over three years to fund the 'Pride-in-Erewash' campaign.

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

- 31 Streetscene and waste management services perform well. The borough is clean and tidy. Based on unaudited data recycling rates and standards of cleanliness have improved to match the best performing councils and public satisfaction with these services is improving, albeit from a low base. However, while the Council has focused on improving the fundamental aspects of service delivery it has yet to fully engage with local people to assess their needs and set and monitor service parameters to ensure it meets these.

Access and diversity

- 32 Customers have effective and convenient access to the services. The Council has implemented a number of initiatives to enhance access, these include:
- the establishment of a customer contact centre with a single telephone contact number for all services;
 - the appointment of the neighbourhood wardens, part of whose remit is to engage with the community and form a highly visible point of contact. They are providing a valuable resource in helping the Council to both identify and address user concerns; and
 - as part of the 'Pride-in Erewash' initiative the Council has established 'Prideline' - a confidential telephone hotline which enables the public to report instances of environmental crime anonymously. This is running for a three-month trial period - it is being well-used and providing useful information.
- 33 There is a wide range of information on the service that users can access electronically, although this is not always complete or up-to-date. The Council's website provides detailed information on streetscene and waste management services, including contact details, although users are unable to request services 'on-line' (although there is an email link to the Council's contact centre). There is also a dedicated recycling website aimed at promoting recycling. Some service standards are provided on the website, but these are incomplete and sometimes inaccurate. For example, it does not inform users of the target for removing flytipping, and it stated that it can take up to six weeks to remove abandoned vehicles, when 93 per cent are actually removed within 24 hours of the Council being legally entitled to do so (on average, eight days from the vehicle being reported to the Council when it is on public land, and four weeks when it is on private land).

- 34** Contact centre staff deal with service requests courteously and efficiently. Two-thirds of all contacts at the contact centre relate to Neighbourhood Services issues. However, users are not always notified of the progress or conclusion of their request for service. This is because while the Council records and monitors the progress of service requests in areas that are subject to a BVPI, the same rigour does not exist in other areas of the service. This means that contact centre staff may have no record of the progress of service requests which can cause difficulties in updating service users.
- 35** The Council is ensuring that services are responsive to user needs by analysing user feedback. A 'comments, compliments and complaints' system has been introduced to use customer feedback as a resource in shaping services. In waste management complaints about missed bins and 'mess' left after collection are used to set improvement targets that form part of individual employees appraisal and development reviews. Team targets have been set to reduce complaints by 5 per cent. Complaints also revealed that there was an increase in public concern over dog fouling after the dog wardens had been incorporated into the highly visible neighbourhood wardens. The Council responded by conducting some 'plain clothes' enforcement exercises which have been successful in apprehending some offending dog owners. User feedback is therefore used as a resource in shaping and improving services.
- 36** The Council has been responsive to the needs of certain groups of residents. For example;
- at Romorantin flats there is severely restricted bin access and so the Council has responded by providing a twice-weekly collection; and
 - when the alternate weekly collection was introduced in the remote community of Morley it was intended that residents would get bags for additional capacity where recycling could not be offered. Several residents complained about the potential for vermin damage and so bins were offered as an alternative.
- 37** Local people are provided with some information about the nature and standard of services they can expect and the Council is currently seeking to enhance the quality of information it provides. Detailed service specifications for waste services and grounds maintenance are published on the Council's website. However, the Council only monitors performance in areas that are subject to BVPIs. It therefore does not know, and users are not informed, whether performance in other areas is meeting the required standard.

- 38 Feedback from community forums highlighted that local people wanted better information on services. In response the Council is developing 'community contracts'. These are specifications that prescribe the standard and frequency of service that will be provided in each local area. This includes street cleansing frequencies to maintain streets at minimum standards of cleanliness, the frequency of emptying of each identified litter and dog bin, timing and location of grass verge cutting and weed control and the timing of waste and recycling collections. These are detailed, street-specific, documents and fulfil a dual role. Firstly they provide local people with comprehensive information about the standard of service they can expect to receive, and secondly they prescribe a detailed service delivery specification for the workforce against which performance can be monitored. The community contracts are currently out to consultation with parish councils to enable local people to have an input to service planning and it is intended they will become operational from 1 July 2006. Other areas of work to address customer needs are also at a developmental stage. For example, a draft set of corporate customer service standards have been produced but not yet implemented and the Council plans to introduce local performance indicators for streetscene and waste management by October 2006 following consultation with local people. Therefore, while the Council is seeking to improve its responsiveness to local needs, its impact in achieving this has yet to be felt.
- 39 The Council's approach to diversity is not well-developed. It currently meets level 1 of the equality standard for local government, a level which most councils now exceed. The Council's charging policy does not make concessions for people on low incomes which could prove a barrier to accessing services for some people. For example, there is a blanket £20 charge for bulky waste collections. The Council is currently reviewing this policy and is also in negotiation with the local housing association about the provision of a subsidised bulk collection service. A number of 'community clean-ups' have been organised in some of the more deprived areas of the borough to allow local people to dispose of waste free of charge. The Council recognises that these measures may be more cost-effective than dealing with fly-tipping that might otherwise occur. A number of other measures are in place to help ensure that the service is responsive to the needs of all users. For example:
- all crews carry a notice in the main community languages advising users how they can get in touch with the contact centre and via that the language translation service;
 - residents who may have difficulty handling wheeled bins are provided with assisted collections;
 - the Council has set a target to remove racist graffiti within 24 hours; and
 - partners in the local strategic partnership have recently been engaged by Neighbourhood Services to identify how the groups they represent would like to be communicated with and also recycling initiatives are being focused to include minority and hard to reach groups.

The Council is therefore taking steps to identify and address the needs of users.

Streetscene

- 40 The borough is maintained to a high and consistent standard. Town centres, rural areas and residential areas are all generally clean and tidy. Parks are attractive and well-maintained. Although graffiti is a problem in some areas, such as Long Eaton, the Council is taking active steps to address this and other issues such as flytipping.
- 41 The Council achieves a relatively high level of performance compared to other councils although this is not yet reflected in improving levels of user satisfaction. The percentage of land that was littered to a significant or heavy extent was 16 per cent in 2004/05, which was above average performance. This level improved to 11 per cent in 2005/06 (unaudited). The latest published satisfaction data (2003/04) shows that residents' satisfaction with standards of cleanliness was below average. However, in the same year the level of satisfaction with the Council's parks and open spaces matched the best performing councils. Local people state that they think the Council is doing a good job in attempting to keep the borough tidy.
- 42 The efforts of the Council are helping to maintain the attractiveness of the borough. Town centres look attractive with well-tended flower beds and traffic islands, parks are attractively maintained and users of sports pitches state that these are also well-maintained. However, in Cotmanhay different grass-cutting regimes on housing association and Council land means that adjoining areas of land can have markedly different lengths of grass. This is compounded by the fact that grass verges which the Council maintains for the County Council are cut less frequently than adjoining housing association land. This disjointed approach adds to the unattractiveness of the area.
- 43 There has been significant investment to improve the performance of the street cleansing service. Since 2004/05 the revenue budget has been increased by £200,000. This has resulted in the 'zoning' of the borough into four zones, which has created a more targeted and responsive approach to street cleansing, and the introduction of additional teams to target fly tipping and heavy littering. The purchase of new street cleansing machinery has resulted in improved levels of cleanliness with the more effective removal of detritus. This investment in the street cleansing service has resulted in a reduction in the percentage of streets littered beyond an acceptable, as indicated above.
- 44 The Council's own satisfaction surveys do not clearly demonstrate whether improved levels of cleanliness are reflected by increased user satisfaction. Public satisfaction with standards of cleanliness in 2003/04 was below average. The Council has carried out its own satisfaction surveys through its citizens' panel. In November 2005 this revealed a 3.6 per cent increase in the proportion of residents who felt that the standard of cleanliness of the roads/streets was acceptable compared to two years previously, but also a 2.6 per cent increase in the proportion who felt it was unacceptable. However, these surveys do not reveal the overall level of satisfaction and therefore it is not possible to state whether the enhancements implemented by the Council have resulted in an increase in resident satisfaction.

- 45 The Council is responsive in addressing problems such as flytipping and abandoned cars. For example, targets are published in the corporate plan to remove 90 per cent of flytips in one day and reduce the incidence of graffiti and flyposting by 10 per cent per year. The introduction of two 'hit squads' has provided the responsiveness and flexibility to deal effectively with these issues. However, it does not routinely monitor and report performance and improvement in these areas. The scheduled introduction of local performance indicators in October 2006 should help to address this, but currently, whilst the Council is confident that it is responding to targets it cannot demonstrate this.
- 46 The Council is proactive in its approach to enforcement. Enforcement activities are undertaken by the neighbourhood wardens who respond to information provided by the public and also carry out proactive enforcement exercises. 44 fixed penalty notices have been issued in the last 12 months, mostly for littering, but also for dog fouling. Prosecutions have been taken in relation to flytipping and dog fouling. The Council has recently purchased CCTV cameras to be used for covert surveillance to obtain evidence to prosecute fly tippers. Neighbourhood wardens have also invoked statutory powers to require landowners to address littering problems on hospital land and at a railway station in the borough.

Waste management

- 47 The Council's performance in relation to other councils is good. The proportion of household waste recycled and composted matched the top performing councils in 2004/05 at 28 per cent. This increased to 38 per cent in 2005/06 (unaudited) which comfortably exceeded the Council's statutory target of 30 per cent. The amount of waste collected per head matched the worst performing council's in 2003/04 and 2004/05 (albeit the Council's data was qualified³). However, information provided by the Council shows that there was a downward trend in the amount of waste collected in 2005/06, with an average of 415kg per head compared to 444kg in 2004/05. The percentage of the population served by a kerbside collection of recyclables matched the best performing councils in 2004/05 at 99 per cent (although again this figure was qualified). Public satisfaction with waste collection and recycling facilities both matched the worst performing councils in 2003/04.
- 48 The amount of household waste that is disposed of in landfill sites is reducing according to data provided by the Council. In 2004/05 72 per cent of waste collected (35,165 tonnes) was landfilled and this figure reduced to 61.7 per cent (28,202 tonnes) in 2005/06. This represents a reduction in the amount of waste landfilled of 6,963 tonnes, a decrease of 19.8 per cent. This indicates that the measures introduced by the Council are having a positive effect on the environmental impact of household waste.

³ The performance indicators relating to amount of waste collected and the percentage of the population served by a kerbside collection of recyclables were qualified in 2004/05 due to a technicality. On this occasion they still provide a reliable representation of the Council's performance in these areas.

- 49 The Council has made some significant changes to the waste management service over the last 18 months in order to promote recycling and minimise waste. An alternate weekly collection has been introduced, with recyclable waste being collected one week and residual waste the next. Wheeled bins are provided for residual and garden waste and reusable bags for glass, paper, plastics and cans. It has adopted a strict 'closed lids and no side waste' policy to reduce waste and encourage recycling. Feedback via the citizens' panel has shown that some residents view this as a deterioration in service. The Council was aware that this might prove unpopular with some residents and took a range of measures to communicate the reasons for the changes prior to their introduction. The Council's actions appear to be having an impact, as the unaudited data for increased recycling and reduced waste levels shows.
- 50 Satisfaction surveys undertaken through the Council's citizens' panel indicate that satisfaction with the waste collection service has generally been improving. In November 2005 overall satisfaction with the garden waste collection was 79.9 per cent compared to 75.9 per cent in 2004, satisfaction with kerbside recycling had improved from 64.4 per cent to 75.3 per cent and satisfaction with recycling sites from 58.9 per cent to 60.3 per cent. However, satisfaction with the 'residual' household waste collection had fallen from 79.5 per cent to 74.5 per cent. As stated, this was due to the unpopularity of the 'closed lids/no side waste' policy with some residents despite the Council attempting to reassure residents of the need for these changes.
- 51 The Council has changed service delivery in the light of learning from complaints. The majority of complaints related to missed bins and there was often doubt as to whether the bins have actually been presented in time for collection. As a result 'drivers logs' were introduced in which the collection round driver accurately records every instance of where a bin has not been presented for collection. This information enables the Council to state with confidence whether a missed bin complaint is genuine and has led to a reduction in the number of spurious complaints. In 2005/06 the monthly average number of missed bins was 91 per 100,000 collections. This had fallen to 28 in April 2006 and 38 in May 2006. The drivers also record where bins have been overfilled, or there is side waste or contamination of recyclables. This information is passed to the neighbourhood wardens who will take up the matter with the householder. This thorough approach means the Council can focus on addressing legitimate service failures and target individual households who are not complying with waste reduction and recycling policy.
- 52 The Council has still to address user concerns over recycling arrangements. Some residents have concerns over the suitability of 'green bags' for recycling, particularly the tendency for them to blow away when empty. The Council is attempting to respond to these concerns and is consulting with users to explore alternative collection methods, but has yet to identify other options.

- 53 Investment in equipment has improved the reliability of the waste management service. Leased vehicles were becoming old and unreliable and expensive to maintain. The Council has now replaced these by purchasing eight new refuse freighters which are more reliable and also promote a more positive image of the Council.
- 54 The Council's trade waste service is not contributing clearly to the aims and objectives of the Council. Trade waste accounts for approximately six per cent of all waste collected by the Council. There is no promotion of recycling for trade waste, and all the waste collected goes directly to landfill. A recent review of the service identified that some customers were not being charged, which contributed to the service operating at a loss. It is now breaking even, and the Council aims to produce a business plan with the intention of it becoming profitable, although it has yet to identify the strategic role for this service. The Council's actions in relation to trade waste are therefore not contributing to the priority of 'protecting and enhancing the environment'.
- 55 The Council is taking steps to reduce its own environmental impact. For example, it uses biological control methods rather than pesticides in its nurseries and has adopted the peatland protection charter which precludes the use of peat. Council waste paper is collected and recycled. Vehicles use five per cent biodiesel and the Council is currently working with the Energy Saving Trust on a fuel efficiency audit of its vehicles.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 56 The services indicate mixed but improving value for money. The cost of waste collection per household was amongst the highest 25 per cent of councils in 2004/05 at £48.79. This figure rose to £61.61 in 2005/06 reflecting the additional investment that the Council has made in the service. However, the Council has undertaken a comparative analysis based on the costs and level of recycling achieved by other councils. This shows the Council in a more favourable position, although it is still higher cost than some councils that achieve a similar or greater level of recycling. There are some factors that contribute to the relatively high cost of the waste collection service that are beyond the Council's control. For example, it can take an hour for refuse freighters to travel to and queue at the nearest available landfill site. As freighters need to unload twice a day this can add four hours unproductive time to the working day.
- 57 The cost of street cleansing compares more favourably with other councils. Data provided by the Council shows that the cost of the service per person was £10.38 in 2005/06. The Council has begun to benchmark services via the Association for Public Service Excellence and information provided from this source has revealed that the average costs of street cleansing for four 'family groupings' of 58 other councils is between £12.38 for the highest cost group and £14.48 for the lowest. The Council has yet to identify which family grouping it most appropriately relates to, but in any event the current cost of service compares relatively favourably. The service is therefore low cost and achieves relatively high levels of performance.

- 58 The Council has taken action to reduce the cost and improve the efficiency of services. This includes:
- reducing 'residual' waste collection rounds from five to four;
 - reducing recycling rounds by one;
 - reducing 'ancillary round' (bulky collections/trade waste) from three-person to two-person crews; and
 - introducing 'demand-led' green waste collection (varying the number of crews depending on the stage of the growing season and amount of green waste being produced) - which the Council anticipates will reduce the resource requirement by half a round over the year.

The impact of efficiency improvements has been that in the first two months of 2006/07 the waste service has saved 179 operative days from the budgeted allowance. These savings should help to reduce the overall cost of the waste service.

- 59 There is a conscious policy of employing a large proportion of agency staff as a pragmatic approach to filling vacancies that has maintained services without incurring excessive additional costs. This provides the flexibility to cover staff absences and respond quickly to fluctuations in demand for the service. A significant reduction in sickness absence, from a high of 20 per cent in 2005 to the current level of 6 per cent has reduced the reliance and expenditure on agency staff.
- 60 The Council does not have clear and accurate information on costs and quality for all key service areas or how these compare to others. It is starting to gather this information in preparation for the forthcoming best value review, but currently it does not routinely analyse and manage its performance in an attempt to match the best councils.
- 61 The Council has engaged in some partnership working to achieve savings. For example, it is part of a joint procurement exercise with Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire councils for agency staff. It is anticipated that this will achieve savings in hourly rates and also have the operational benefit of providing a single point of contact rather than phoning several suppliers. The Council has also participated in an 'e-auction' in partnership with the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) and the East Midlands Centre for Excellence for the purchase of wheeled bins which enables a 15 per cent cost saving. The Council sources much of its plant and equipment through ESPO which can achieve competitive rates through bulk purchasing.
- 62 The Council's corporate approach to achieving value for money is not well developed. For example, Neighbourhood Services has been allocated a blanket target of achieving 5 per cent savings on its 2006/07 revenue budget but managers are not rigorously challenged to demonstrate that services are achieving acceptable levels of cost and quality in all areas.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 63** Service performance has shown notable signs of improvement during the last twelve months, particularly in areas that have been identified as priorities. Customer satisfaction has shown signs of improvement based upon the Council's own intelligence, although there are understandable tensions around the substantial changes in the waste collection service, with the roll-out of kerbside recycling and the corresponding changes necessary to effect waste reduction. There is a co-ordinated approach to refining and improving the service, in consultation with councillors and service users. Potential barriers to further improvement are being addressed, supported by the Best Value review process. Value for money has been a secondary issue to the priority of improving service quality and effectiveness and is not yet routinely embedded in service planning.
- 64** The Council has a recent track record of delivering improvements in its waste recycling and street cleansing services. Performance in these areas has shown consistent improvements following significant investment into these stated priorities. Based on information supplied by the Council, recycling and composting performance has improved to 38 per cent for 2005/06. The Council continues to be the highest performing district in Derbyshire in this area. There is a clear expectation that the Council will exceed its statutory target and trends indicate that improved performance is realistically attainable and sustainable. Public satisfaction with aspects of the street scene service, including for example, standards of cleanliness, enforcement against fly-tipping and graffiti removal have been maintained or improved based on Council data. Local people confirm that there has been a sustained or improved quality of service in the street scene during the last 12 months.
- 65** The key changes that the Council has introduced are having a positive impact on service improvement, such as the introduction of neighbourhood wardens, but there remain some obstacles to improvement that need to be overcome. The introduction of kerbside recycling collections across the borough has substantially increased the level of recycling, but there are still issues that the Council needs to address if it is to maximise participation in recycling by residents and deliver significantly improved value for money from what is a comparatively high cost service. The operation of the green bag scheme is currently being reviewed to increase operational effectiveness in some geographical areas and address the concerns of some users over the suitability of bags. However, the implementation of the kerbside recycling scheme has radically improved recycling levels with a generally favourable reception from residents.

- 66 Lead councillors and officers have worked together to implement key changes in service delivery. Waste collection rounds have been reviewed and revised, which has reduced the number of rounds undertaken and the number of household collections annually, along with the implementation of a 'lid down, no side waste' policy. This supports the national and local aim of reducing the levels of waste collected and transported to landfill, but has proved unpopular initially with some residents.
- 67 Improvement is not as pronounced in some specific areas. For example, at the Hopewell farm estate there continue to be problems associated with graffiti, litter and fly-tipping. The Council is taking positive steps to address this and is taking part in implementing initiatives which are constructively developed with partners. The Cotmanhay Clean-Up was undertaken by Erewash Borough Council in conjunction with Three Valleys Housing and the SureStart project. Litter is a high priority and a targeted litter pick was completed with support from neighbourhood wardens and deemed to be successful. There is increased focus of resources to problem areas and additional litter picking is undertaken at Cotmanhay to improve the street scene and quality of life for the area, combined with educational initiatives to address the problem at its roots. Partners note that the Council's willingness to commit to, and engage in, shared initiatives and joined up working to deliver better outcomes has improved significantly over the last two years.
- 68 The Council cannot demonstrate improved value for money across the whole range of neighbourhood, particularly in relation to waste collection. Substantial investment has been required to put in place the infrastructure necessary to deliver sustainable service improvements. In recent years there has been a lengthy period of management instability both corporately and within the department. The use of interim managers and a high proportion of agency staff, combined with high levels of staff sickness and ageing equipment, with high maintenance costs, have all served to drive up costs. The initial focus of the new management team has been to address the quality and effectiveness of the service being delivered to customers, prior to addressing fundamental value for money considerations.
- 69 Longer-term investment decisions have been made in line with the Council's stated priorities in this area, which are a key overall corporate objective. A new management structure has been put into place and vacancies filled. Additional external investment has been achieved via a DEFRA grant to implement kerbside recycling and the Council has committed capital investment in the purchase of new waste freighters to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Improvements to procurement processes have been a corporate focus, with a procurement officer recruited and a procurement strategy developed.

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- 70 The street cleansing and grounds maintenance function is a clearer indicator of improvement being delivered, where there has been more stability historically. Managers are long-serving and experienced, the service has a record of ongoing improvement and costs are below that of peers. The next stage of improvement will require efficiency savings and value for money to be fully embedded in the service planning process, supported by local performance indicators developed in conjunction with stakeholders. The Council has established a target to develop local performance indicators across the service by October 2006.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 71 Targets are in place for performance against Best Value performance indicators and are incorporated into the draft corporate plan. These are clear and challenging and supported by performance monitoring arrangements that hold councillors and officers to account. The Council has not yet set local targets for street scene services which reflect community priorities. The leadership is actively overseeing the quality and effectiveness of the services provided through the receipt of regular monitoring reports and challenging the responsiveness and customer focus of services where appropriate. A detailed and wide-ranging performance culture is not yet embedded across the Council or Neighbourhood Services specifically and there has been an historic lack of focus on improving value for money.
- 72 The Council has clear and challenging aims for street scene services. A corporate commitment to 'enhance and improve our environment' is one of the six key objectives in the draft corporate plan. The Council has given clarity to this objective by identifying the priorities which are specifically relevant to street scene services. For each priority the Council has identified a number of actions that will contribute to the delivery of intended outcomes, such as to organise and undertake regular community clean-ups and to reduce the level of flytipping and graffiti through enforcement. Milestones and targets are identified for all actions to provide clarity to the expected outcomes that success would deliver.
- 73 BVPI targets are set in consultation with department directors and service managers, but there is not a formal corporate scrutiny process applied to targets which assesses the impact and resource implications of achieving them, or the priorities of the community.
- 74 Service plans contain clear and specific actions, and identify whether resources are sufficient to deliver the objective. There are logical and transparent links to corporate aims and objectives and clarity as to how service initiatives underpin those corporate aims. The Neighbourhood Services delivery plan 2006-2007 has a strong emphasis on improving customer focus which is a logical step forward, having addressed capacity issues which impacted negatively on service delivery in key areas. Other themes are to bring greater focus upon equality and diversity issues, improved engagement with the community and a structured approach to staff development. Successful implementation of the plan will bring improved customer focus and increased capacity across the workforce, which in turn increases the likelihood of improvement in value for money, efficiency and service quality.

- 75 The Council and the Neighbourhood Services Directorate have set challenging targets for future service performance that address national and corporate priorities. They are specifically developed to address previous weaknesses in performance and areas which have been notably deficient, such as equality and diversity. The service delivery plan sets out milestones to measure progress against objectives and targets. These reflect levels of quality where applicable, such as a Green flag quality standard for parks. The Council has determined that targets for key services such as recycling and street cleanliness should deliver 'top quartile' performance when compared with peers. Many service plan targets require 'improvement' but do not quantify the degree of improvement required within the plan, although they are specified in the BVPI monitoring framework.
- 76 There is a clear willingness on the part of the Council to explore efficiency savings, and it is reasonable to anticipate savings being delivered as maintenance costs reduce, staff sickness is effectively managed and existing leases for old refuse freighters expire. A delayed Best Value review of neighbourhood services is currently commencing and should be a key tool for identifying potential areas for improving both the quality and value for money of the services delivered.
- 77 The ownership of delivering improved services and initiatives which are set out in the Council's future plans is clearly and logically defined. Priorities, aims and objectives are cascaded from the draft corporate plan into service planning and implementation is tasked to relevant groups and teams. Individuals are personally identified as having responsibility for delivering improved outcomes in specific relevant areas, such as reducing street cleansing complaints. The activities of individual staff and teams are therefore linked to Council objectives and improvement targets are set against which performance is monitored.
- 78 There is insufficient integration between financial and service planning processes, in order for improved value for money to be delivered, whilst raising standards and sustaining service quality. The full financial impact of attaining service targets is not thoroughly embedded into the service planning process. Budget monitoring has been improved with a range of cost centres established across the Neighbourhood Services department with respective service managers responsible for their particular areas. Corporate budgeting systems operate in real time and take existing commitments into account. This ensures that orders cannot be raised which would exceed budget without appropriate authorisation being obtained. Closer links between financial and service planning combined with robust monitoring and compliance with budgets increases the likelihood of efficiency savings and improved value for money being delivered.
- 79 Management of the service has been unfavourably affected by a high degree of change both corporately and within Neighbourhood Services. The corporate senior management has undergone dramatic and regular change during the past three years. The capacity for effective management and leadership has been weakened as a result. This is now being addressed, with a stable management structure now in place both in Neighbourhood Services and corporately. There is not currently a chief executive officer in post, although recruitment is underway.

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- 80 There is closer collaboration between councillors and officers and a willingness to make a firm commitment to customer focus within Neighbourhood Services, which has yet to be fully implemented throughout the organisation. The Leader and Acting Chief Executive promote the corporate aims and priorities through staff briefings and a newsletter. Communication is further enhanced by annual appraisals and development reviews for all staff. Service area managers report that they are given devolved responsibility and are therefore empowered to deliver against the developed plans. Partners and stakeholders recognise an increased desire by the Council to increase capacity and improve outcomes through undertaking collaborative projects. The establishment of six nature reserves across the borough has been facilitated through an effective, long-standing and beneficial partnership with Groundwork Erewash which has attracted notable additional funding to the area. There is evidence of a strong commitment to using legislative powers, via the new neighbourhood warden service, through rigorous enforcement mechanisms to address difficult problems such as fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles. Effective collaboration both internally and externally will increase capacity to deliver better services.
- 81 Performance management arrangements have been adopted and there is a basic structure in place for monitoring performance. A period of instability at senior management level has delayed implementation, and a wide-ranging performance framework has yet to be established, leaving a focus on BVPI's. The introduction of local performance indicators during the current year will help to enable the establishment of a robust performance culture to be fully embedded across the Council. Neighbourhood Services has actively engaged with the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to benchmark services and to determine an appropriate comparative peer group of councils. This will enable effective performance monitoring against a realistic peer group and inform future target setting, cost reduction opportunities and service quality aspirations. Performance against BVPI targets is monitored monthly by managers via a corporate reporting process, which includes full year forecasting from the current month.
- 82 The Council has demonstrated a high level of self-awareness. It has provided a comprehensive self-assessment which shows a clear awareness of strengths and weaknesses in the current context, along with an understanding of where future challenges lay. While performance management arrangements are improving corporately they are focused on monitoring and improving service performance with insufficient emphasis to date on improving value for money.
- 83 The extent to which service user feedback is used to shape service delivery is still being developed. Complaints and comments are collated by the contact centre and this information is used by service managers to improve services, for example, setting targets to reduce the number of complaints about missed bins. Positive outcomes have also been delivered through the Street Scene partnership with close collaboration between the Council and the Police and Fire Authorities to address environmental hazards by engaging with traders at the Phoenix Mills site.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 84** Deficiencies in management staffing levels have been addressed after a long period of instability. Staff development and training are being approached in a structured way to build capacity. Sickness absence has been substantially reduced from 20 per cent in the previous year to 6 per cent at the current time. Additional capacity has been added to the corporate human resources function and this has enabled a more robust and effective approach to managing sickness. An increased willingness to work with partners has successfully delivered a number of improvements in addition to adding capacity and providing access to funding streams that the Council cannot access directly. For example, a joint bid with Groundwork Erewash delivered a £61,000 grant to provide an additional 5,000 brown bins to support composting initiatives across the borough.
- 85** Action has been taken to ensure that key services are maintained, such as the use of agency staff to address seasonal fluctuations in the type of services needed and delivered. This reduces fixed overhead costs and is being supported by improved staff development, for example in HGV driving skills, which will in turn further reduce agency costs and improve value for money.
- 86** The Council accepts further resources to deliver improvements will need to be derived from improved efficiencies, both corporately and across specific service areas. Potential for further large scale direct investment is limited. There is investment in PRINCE2 project management skills to build capacity and increase the likelihood of projects succeeding within tolerances, thereby reducing delays and potential overspends.
- 87** The Council has a medium-term financial plan in place which will allow it to identify the resources required to deliver plans and to identify sources of funding. Greater liaison between service managers and finance staff has improved understanding and accountability, with finance managers attending departmental meetings and providing regular guidance on budgetary control. Stronger links between financial control and service delivery increase the opportunities for efficiency savings without a reduction in service quality.
- 88** Action has been taken to improve the capacity of the front line workforce. Workforce planning arrangements have been implemented to ensure that staff are equipped with the appropriate skills to deliver the required level of service. Staff have an annual appraisal and development review (EDPR) to identify how they contribute to corporate aims and objectives. This process also identifies any training or development requirements. Management development is an area of further focus with greater collaboration and peer support across service areas within the Neighbourhood Services department to develop additional capacity.

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- 89 There has been an increased focus on customer care. A contact centre has been established in Long Eaton and most of the borough's environmental services can be accessed through this medium. There is scope for further improvement in that all enquiries are not formally 'closed' by the service area, which would allow contact centre staff access to information as to how an enquiry was ultimately resolved. Further enhancements to customer care have been implemented through the adoption of a corporate complaints, compliments and comments system which can be used to inform future service planning and form part of staff development plans. This system provides an additional source of management information through which the performance and responsiveness of the service can be actively challenged by the leadership of the Council.
- 90 Improvements have been made in addressing issues of equality and diversity which has been an acknowledged weakness historically. Access to services is enhanced by the engagement of the Language Line facility to provide translation services. Refuse freighters have cards in the cabs with contact details in a variety of languages to assist customer enquiries.
- 91 The Council has focused corporately on the need to improve its procurement processes to deliver improved value for money. A procurement strategy has been developed and a procurement officer appointed. The Council has achieved savings through its participation in an e-Auction to procure wheeled bins. Improved procurement is a key tool in successfully delivering efficiency savings to allow greater resources to be directed to service delivery.
- 92 There is clear evidence of a willingness to learn from peers and the community to identify better or more efficient ways of delivering services in the future. Visits have been made to a number of other local districts seeking good practice for street cleansing and grounds maintenance. The Council has aspirations to establish a youth parliament to engage younger members of the community. Learning from peers and the community will strengthen the capacity to deliver an effective user focused service.
- 93 The Council has exploited some opportunities for inward investment, but there is potential for improvement. Numerous successful projects with Groundwork Erewash have delivered matched funding at the least and often much better inward investment into environmental improvements in the borough which are a stated priority; however, other opportunities to acquire external funding have not been fully explored. Actively pursuing all opportunities for additional funding adds capacity to improve the borough's environment and deliver better outcomes for the community.
- 94 Councillors are clear about their role and responsibilities in terms of their commitment to improving the environment of the borough. The lead councillor for Neighbourhood Services engages well with the departmental management team and has a clear grasp of the department's priorities and his role reinforcing them. The lead councillor has a good perception of user focus and challenges the service on issues that are communicated by local people and other councillors. The regular challenge of the service by the Service Effectiveness Panel (overview and scrutiny) has in turn helped to reinforce accountability for delivering required levels of service and emphasising the need for improvement where appropriate.

- 95 The Council has a strong commitment to working with partners at a countywide level. Erewash actively supports waste management initiatives and leads its peers in terms of volume recycling. The Council is an active and enthusiastic partner in the development of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and is aware that if targets for recycling and cleanliness in the LAA are achieved this will not only enhance service delivery and customer satisfaction, but also improve value for money as a result of the financial rewards that will be secured by success.
- 96 The Council has been proactive in promoting the need for improvements and enhancements to the local environment. To further support this aim the Council has implemented the Pride in Erewash initiative to engender a greater community ownership of and responsibility for its environment. There is a dedicated telephone contact number - 'Prideline'- for residents to identify specific problems and enable resources to be targeted to address emerging issues at local level. Similarly Erewash in Bloom has been launched and actively promoted to residents by councillors. Greater community engagement will increase the likelihood of success in achieving environmental improvement.
- 97 Sponsorship funding has been obtained to further promote and support a cleaner environment. Dog litter bins and traffic islands have received sponsorship, but there remain further opportunities to exploit this additional resource. Greater engagement by the business community in enhancing the environment of the borough will add capacity and help to further corporate aims and objectives.
- 98 The Council has responded to external challenge by proposing to undertake a Best Value Review of Neighbourhood Services. The review will be completed during 2006 and is being overseen by an experienced senior officer. Prospects for future improvement are further enhanced by this process, which will identify areas requiring additional focus to deliver improvement.