

Subject: Environment Inspection June 2006

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 15th November 2006

Report of: Head of StreetScene & Liveability

Portfolio

Holder: Cabinet member for Street Scene and Liveability

Key Decision:

NO

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

"X" In Relevant Box

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of the outcome of the Environment Inspection in June 2006 and to note the contents of the report. Although the report is dated June 2006, the actual inspection took place in early February 2006.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report are linked to and support the following corporate priorities:
- Embedding our customer promise
 - Delivery on the District Vision

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 The report concludes that the council's approach to environmental services is fair, with promising prospects for improvement. Performance in environmental services shows steady improvement, and overall best value performance indicators are grouped around the national average, though performance levels in some services such as street cleanliness are still below national averages. Staff are energised by the changes, and morale and performance management

are improving. Sickness absence, however, though lower, remains an area the Council needs to focus on. The Council has thus put in place the building blocks of effective policy and service delivery, though several are still at an early stage and will not bring benefits for some time. We therefore assess the present approach as **fair**, with **promising**¹ prospects for improvement. The main points of the report are summarised below.

- 4.2 The Council recognises that it has rich environmental assets, and rightly makes managing the environment a high priority. Some imaginative and exciting ideas are emerging, aided by an unusually self-reliant and entrepreneurial community voice. The latest community-led project, the Adrenaline Gateway, will bring cultural, environmental and economic benefits through regenerating a former quarry as a regional extreme sports venue.
- 4.3 The Council has managed the environment as a cultural asset for some time, and has achieved outcomes such as the Irwell sculpture trail and refurbished play areas. However, at present much of the Council's strategic thinking about the management of environmental assets in other areas is at the concept stage. In sectors such as economic development, tourism and health, policy is being researched or formulated now, and monitoring the impact of environmental policies on the borough's diverse communities is at an early stage of development. Transport access and health, for example, are issues with an environmental aspect that show significant variation within the borough.
- 4.4 In the last three years the Council has worked hard with partners to deliver better services and has given greater prominence to understanding what matters to local people. Consulting the community and managing communications and PR, along with improvements in basic environmental services such as street cleansing and refuse collection, are beginning to turn round the Council's reputation, previously poor, with the public.
- 4.5 The council is steadily developing policy and performance in managing its environmental assets, but still has some way to go. It acknowledges the improving communication with customers, within which it has produced and promoted environmental service standards, fostered the role of the community network and opened a one-stop shop and adopted a more proactive approach to managing press and public reaction.
- 4.6 The Council is tackling environmental issues such as litter, graffiti and waste collection that matter to local people. Recycling and quantities of waste collected compare well with other authorities. The Council is involved in a number of projects that improve open spaces and encourage people to use them. It also works with local organisations on education to enhance understanding and care of the environment – for example its schools programme and the voluntary group Civic Pride.
- 4.7 Sickness absence has fallen and is now being actively managed, though it remains a financial drain on services.
- 4.8 The approach has promising prospects for improvement because:
- current environmental policies are challenging and take account of local, national and regional issues;
 - The Council is assembling a solid statistical base for policy-making - such as the recent open spaces review and ongoing conservation area character assessments - and uses consultation and citizens' panel surveys to inform policies;

¹ Audit Commission Environmental Service Inspection Report June 2006

- The Council and its partners recognise that the borough's cultural and economic future is bound up with the environment, and corporate policies give priority to the management of environmental assets;
- Funding decisions reflect this priority, and streetscene and liveability services are included among the priorities for spending in 2006-07;
- The Council is filling in gaps in major plans to consolidate this vision, for example the local development framework, economic development strategy, tourism, health and asset management plans;
- The Council now involves a wide range of partners and stakeholders in shaping environmental policy and plays an active part in regional and sub regional strategic groups;
- Reorganisation, such as the introduction of NEAT teams - is making a difference both to service delivery and to rapport with the public;
- A StreetScene & Liveability service review has led to the introduction of quality management practices incorporating a more customer-oriented approach to service delivery, and better value for money through redesigned refuse collection and cleansing rounds, vehicle replacements and litter collection methods; as a result, there is a steady improvement in performance in environmental services such as recycling and street cleanliness. There is also an improvement in the quality of the natural environment, open spaces and the built environment and residents are beginning to recognise a difference in services.
- Public satisfaction with environmental services, and with the neighbourhood as a place to live improved strongly from 2003 to 2005;
- The Council pursues alternative means of service delivery to improve performance. It has a positive approach to working in partnership and is playing a more active role in several of its existing partnerships. It is resourceful about getting added value from partnerships to extend management capacity and augment resources. Partners are positive about the new spirit of collaboration;
- It is currently seeking an external partnership to deliver modernised and improved SS&L services;
- Staff morale and efficiency have risen with the introduction of quality management systems, good HR practices and better communications; and
- Corporate improvement of 'tools for the job' such as IT, GIS and the one-stop shop supports service improvement.

5. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCIAL SERVICES

- 5.1 There are no specific financial issues for members to consider arising from this report.

6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

- 6.1 There are no specific legal issues for members to consider arising from this report.

7. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

7.1 There are no specific HR issues for members to consider arising from this report.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Since the inspection in February 2006, there have been further significant improvements. The Audit Commission stated that some improvements in environmental services are too recent to affect performance measures or are still in the pipeline. It highlights more efficient cleansing routeing and frequency, sickness and fleet reliability. Since the Inspection we have commissioned a new refuse fleet which will be brought on stream in the next month or so and this will improve the reliability of our collections, we have also incorporated funding for new mechanical sweepers for Street Cleansing, which has seen a profound effect on the Best Value Performance Indicators. Currently sickness/absence within StreetScene & Liveability is the lowest within the whole council and the restructuring of Environmental Health has now taken place. There has been a significant impact on customer satisfaction across the whole of the service.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 That members acknowledge the report and its contents and acknowledges the contribution made by staff to improve the service.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Not Applicable.

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Audit Commission Environmental Service Inspection Report June 2006	http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/BVIR.asp?CategoryID=ENGLISH^576^LOCAL-VIEW^AUTHORITIES^106986&ProdID=69A08036-5330-4acc-A564-EB58F7F10E62&CPAOnly=true