

Service Inspection Report

August 2006

Waste Management and Street Scene

Uttlesford District Council

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Service Inspection

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

Audit Commission service inspections should:

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

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

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

Summary

- 1 Uttlesford District is a large, predominantly rural area in north west Essex with borders to Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The district has a population of 70,400, with a low proportion from black and minority ethnic groups. Uttlesford is one of the least deprived in England and the major employer is Stansted Airport with 10,300 jobs.
- 2 The Council's waste and street scene service is largely responsible for the delivery of the Council's priority of *'protecting and enhancing the environment and character of the district'*. The purpose of the inspection was to establish how effectively the service contributes to the protection and enhancement of both Uttlesford's environment and the wider environment. The scope included waste collection and recycling; and street cleaning, but excluded the grounds maintenance service. The service is one of the Council's most important public-facing services.
- 3 Overall, the Council's waste and street scene service is 'fair'. The service is in transition; 2004/05 comparative performance was poor in some key aspects of the service, although there is some mitigation for this situation and public satisfaction was high. Some improvements in performance were delivered in 2005/06, which is continuing in 2006. The local environment is improving; most areas in the district are clean and free of litter, graffiti and abandoned vehicles. The service is responsive with a balanced approach to education and enforcement and has developed a good approach to communication, as part of the introduction of a new waste collection and recycling service.
- 4 However, equality and diversity are not well developed and there was no public consultation on the proposal to move to a three-bin approach for refuse collection and recycling, before the adoption of the new waste management strategy in December 2005. Accessing the service via the telephone is good, particularly as part of the roll-out of the new system, but the Council's website is in need of development. Overall, services do not demonstrate value for money.
- 5 There are promising prospects for improvement in the service. Implementing its waste strategy is one of the Council's key priorities and it has taken bold action to improve performance. The introduction of a three-bin system (including a separation of kitchen waste) is designed to improve significantly the Council's recycling performance and reduce waste to landfill. This action reduces the costs to the County Council as waste disposal authority and supports the county-wide joint waste management strategy.
- 6 Arrangements for service delivery and planned improvements are well resourced and service capacity has been increased. Plans to address current weaknesses and wider environmental aims are in place, with available funding.

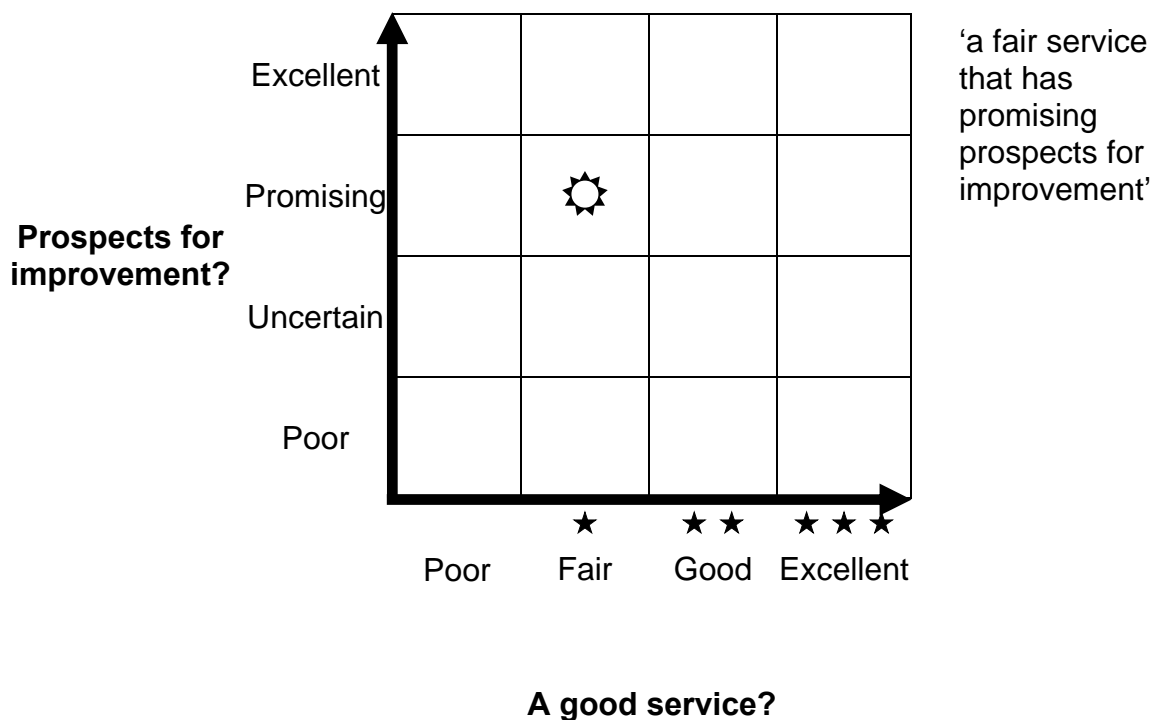
6 Waste Management and Street Scene | Summary

- 7 There is a clear commitment to continuous improvement, with investment in better corporate systems and procedures. Corporate capacity in key areas is being developed through the use of new technology, procurement and partnerships, and the Council is making progress in areas such as risk management and performance management to increase capacity.
- 8 However, there is no detailed medium-term financial model for the service and there are some risks and challenges to manage in the near future. While performance management is improving, a focus on value for money and effective challenge for the service are under-developed.

Scoring the service

- 9 We have assessed Uttlesford District Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

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

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

- the waste/recycling collection service has high levels of customer satisfaction;
- there is a reasonable spread of facilities across the district to supplement the Council's waste collections, including 57 bring-sites which are well located;
- some improvement in performance in 2005/06, continuing in 2006;
- most areas in the district are clean and free of litter, graffiti and abandoned vehicles; and
- the Council has developed a balanced approach to education and enforcement on environmental issues and has had success in pursuing enforcement against offenders,

11 However:

- in terms of national indicators, the Council has performed poorly in comparison to others in recycling waste and minimising the amount it collects, although it performs well in household waste recycled, with improving recycling performance and decreasing the amount of waste collected;
- the Council lacks a cohesive and co-ordinated approach to consultation and public engagement and there was no public consultation on the new waste management strategy, although the project plan for the new system of collection does include its own discrete communications strategy;
- although the basic content of the Council's website is effective, it is in need of development to provide relevant information on standards of service and to allow the public to transact with the Council through the website outside of normal office hours;
- the Council's approach to diversity is under-developed and there is still work to do with hard-to-reach groups; and
- overall, the service cannot demonstrate a consistent approach to value for money (VFM).

12 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has plans to improve the service that address most current weaknesses and wider environmental aims;
- the Council has been prepared to take difficult decisions in order to secure significant improvements in performance;
- project planning for the introduction of the new system of waste and recycling collection is of a high standard and is providing positive outcomes;
- the introduction of a new three-bin system has been the subject of good project management and is well resourced. It has been supported with effective communication and information about the changes to refuse collection for local people and should significantly improve recycling;
- service capacity has been enhanced, with effective and positive leadership and is delivering improved recycling performance and less waste to landfill;

- the Council is introducing mechanisms to increase corporate capacity through use of new technology, procurement and partnerships, and performance management is becoming more effective; and
- although street cleaning is already within top quartile performance, the Council is looking to improve the service and has budgeted to undertake a further review during 2006/07.

13 However:

- there is no detailed medium-term financial model for the service and no corporate medium-term financial strategy; and
- while performance management is improving, a focus on value for money both corporately and for the service is under-developed.

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 costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

Recommendation

R1 Demonstrate and improve value for money in the service by:

- conducting productivity/quality reviews to establish how efficient the current operation is and where improvements or further investments are needed;*
- using technology to reduce administration and overhead costs; and*
- review the financial management arrangements in the service to make the best use of corporate capacity and remove unnecessary administration.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

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

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

Recommendation

R2 Ensure the financial sustainability in the service by:

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

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

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

Report

Context

The locality

- 15 Uttlesford district is in north west Essex with borders to Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The population of the area is 70,400 (mid-2004 population estimates) with the majority of residents aged between 30 and 59 years. Uttlesford has a relatively low BME (black and minority ethnic) population, with 95.09 per cent of the population recorded as 'White British' in the 2001 census. Overall, educational achievement is good and above regional and national averages. There are 58 parishes, including four main towns, namely Saffron Walden, Thaxted, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet.
- 16 The district is one of the least deprived in England, ranked 341st out of 354 in the country. The majority of areas within Uttlesford fall within the least deprived areas in England. Unemployment does not appear to be a significant issue for the people of the area, the latest claimant rate for April 2006 being 0.9, well below regional and national rates. The major employer in the district is Stansted Airport with 10,300 jobs.
- 17 Uttlesford has two national nature reserves, 34 conservation areas, 3,592 listed buildings and 6.5 per cent of the district is in green belt. The expansion of the airport and pressure for growth along the M11 corridor are significant challenges facing the district in the future.

The Council

- 18 The Council is Liberal-Democrat controlled. Of the 44 seats the Liberal Democrats have 27 seats, 12 are held by the Conservative party and 5 by independents and others. The Council operates a scheme under the alternative arrangements provided for by the Local Government Act 2000. Currently the Council has three main committees: Community; Environment; and Operations. It also has two Overview and Scrutiny committees, and two regulatory committees - Development Control; and Licensing.
- 19 A system of Area Panels was introduced earlier this year, as part of the process of engaging with residents. There are three panels: north; south west; and east.
- 20 The Council's overall service budget for the year 2006/07 is £10.872 million.
- 21 The purpose of the Council is defined in the Corporate Plan 2006/09 as:
'improve the quality of life of the people who live, work or visit Uttlesford'.

- 22 The Council has identified five ways in which quality of life can be improved: these are the five strategic aims in the Council's Quality of Life Plan:
- providing strong community leadership and openness;
 - protecting and enhancing the environment and character of the district;
 - improving access to value for money services;
 - improving community safety and health of the population; and
 - supporting lifelong learning and developing better opportunities for young people.
- 23 The four key corporate plan priorities for 2006/09 are:
- implementing the Council's waste strategy;
 - dealing with proposals for the expansion of Stansted Airport and other development;
 - progressing the Council's integrated customer management (ICM) process; and
 - user focus and community engagement.

The Council's waste management and street scene services

- 24 The purpose of the inspection was to establish how effectively the inspected services contribute to the protection and enhancement of both Uttlesford's environment and the wider environment.
- 25 The scope of the inspection included waste collection and recycling; and street cleaning (named the 'service' elsewhere in this report). We did not inspect the grounds maintenance service. The service areas inspected are some of the Council's most important public-facing services and, as such, are also seen as high priority by the Council.
- 26 The waste management and street scene services fall within the environmental services department. The environment service plan for 2006/09 has a strong focus on implementation of the Council's waste strategy, which was adopted in December 2005.
- 27 Up until April 2006, refuse collection (by way of a weekly, back door, black sack method), commercial waste collections, servicing recycling banks and servicing weekend skips for general waste were provided by an external contractor. At that time, fortnightly collections of kerbside dry recyclables were undertaken by an in-house team. Street cleaning is also an in-house operation.
- 28 Since April 2006, all of these services have been undertaken in-house and in June 2006, the Council started to roll-out a three-bin system across the whole district. This system provides:
- one 240 litre bin for recyclables;
 - one 180 litre bin for refuse that cannot be recycled; and
 - one 140 litre bin for kitchen waste.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 29 The Council has placed a consistently high priority on the environment over the past few years. Improving quality of life is at the centre of the Council's purpose and it has identified five strategic aims in its Quality of Life Plan, including:
- 'protecting and enhancing the environment and character of the district'.*
- 30 One of the priorities identified in the community plan for the district is 'to conserve our environment for future generations', including targets to reduce waste and increase recycling. Similarly, the local area agreement for Essex (March 2006) includes a priority to *'actively manage our environment'*. The agreement states that this priority would help *'to address behaviour in Rochford, Tending, Uttlesford and Maldon, where residents recycle/compost markedly less than they could'*.
- 31 The Quality of Life plan has been kept under regular review and the most recent review culminated in the corporate plan for 2006/09. Four key priorities are identified in the corporate plan, including:
- 'implementing the Council's waste strategy'*.
- 32 It is the waste strategy which provides the main focus for the environment service plan 2006/09. The strategy was adopted by the Council in December 2005 and identified three main aims for the Council, which complement both the county-wide waste strategy for Essex and national priorities:
- reduce the impact of Landfill Directives and associated regulations;
 - meet its previous statutory target of 36 per cent recycling by 2007/08; and
 - continue to increase levels of recycling to the practical maximum.

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

Access, customer care and user/or community focus

- 33** The Council's approach to consultation with the public and service users is limited. There was no public consultation on its main proposal to move to a three-bin approach for refuse collection and recycling, before the adoption of the new waste management strategy in December 2005. The Council took the view that, in order to meet its recycling targets and to reduce the unacceptably high levels of waste sent to landfill, there was little point in consulting residents when, in its judgement, there was only one realistic option. However, there have been examples of consultation on budget priorities through the newsletter to residents (2004) and an exercise by external consultants using telephone interviews with 255 residents (2006). As a result, there is a feeling among some local people that the lack of consultation on the waste strategy has unfairly deprived them of an opportunity to comment on both the new operational arrangements and the financial implications of the new system.
- 34** The Council has no corporate communications and consultation strategy, although steps are being taken to address the situation. Although there are currently shortcomings in the Council's corporate approach to communications, the experience in relation to the new waste and recycling scheme has been an exception. The approach to users and potential users of the service is informative and responsive.
- 35** The website provides some useful information, but lacks a consistent interactive facility. It provides articles to encourage composting, gives opening times for household waste and recycling centres and information on street sweeping and litter picking. However, it is not easy to arrange for assisted collections or pay for services on line, or to report fly-ipping via the website, and there are no service standards or response times. Consequently, the public are not able to easily see how well the Council is delivering what it promised or to transact with the Council through the website outside of normal office hours.
- 36** In each of the last two years, the Council has commissioned 'mystery shoppers' to assess customer experience for street services, with very positive results. The Council employed an external company to undertake 100 calls in both October 2004 and 2005. The results showed good scores in all areas, particularly in dealing with members of the public, with improvements from year-to-year. This exercise and the results demonstrate a commitment to customer care.

- 37 Access to facilities where the public can recycle and dispose of waste or litter is generally good.
- There are some 250 dog litter bins across the district, most of which are owned by parishes and emptied by the Council's Direct Services Organisation.
 - There are 57 recycling banks to supplement the Council's kerbside collections. The majority of these are clean and tidy and accessible to most sections of the community and the Council is delivering a programme of improvement.
 - The Council provides a free service for collection of bulky items of waste and undertakes to organise collection within seven working days.
 - At the request of parish councils, Uttlesford has introduced a mobile weekend collection of green waste at 17 locations, between the months of March and October each year.
- 38 The Council's approach to dog nuisance and fouling is good. There is one animal warden, whose role is seen as predominantly one of education rather than enforcement. Recent initiatives include subsidised micro-chipping of dogs and promotion of the use of dog litter facilities by the purchase a distribution free of charge of 25,000 poop scoop bags, as part of National Poop Scoop week 2006. There are few complaints or concerns from local people about dog fouling or related issues.

Diversity

- 39 The Council's approach to diversity is developing. Corporately, there is no strategic use of information about ethnicity, vulnerability and disability of service users. The Commission for Racial Equality's quality level 1 (of five levels) has not yet been met and service plans do not include implications for equalities and diversity, although reports to committees do now have sections on equality considerations. The Council recognises the need for further development and took a positive step in 2005 with the holding of a Diversity Festival. The intelligence gained from the festival is being used to seek to establish focus groups. With external funding and practical support, steps are being taken to develop equalities, with a target of reaching level 2 by 2008. Until the Council achieves a greater level of understanding of diversity across the organisation, it cannot be sure that it is providing a consistent level of service throughout its community.

Service outcomes for users and the community

- 40 The waste collection and recycling service is delivering what it set out to do, but remains behind others in some aspects of the service, including the high levels of waste collected per head and in not meeting its statutory recycling target of 30 per cent. This under-performance is, however, mitigated by the Council's performance in recycling household waste (BVPI 82a), which has been achieved whilst the waste collected per head has decreased (BVPI 84). Also, despite the geographical size of the district, Uttlesford currently has only been provided with one civic amenity point by the County Council.

- 41 There are high levels of satisfaction with most environmental services, including contact with the Council about waste collection at 96.5 per cent. The promotion of home composting as part of a joint initiative with the County Council has resulted in 5,500 compost bins being provided since 2001. The Council also provides weekend recycling sites at Saffron Walden, Thaxted and Stansted (for wood, scrap metal and green waste), which are particularly welcomed and well used. Significant work is undertaken to support wider environmental issues in the community, such as reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and providing planning guidance on insulation to reduce energy use.
- 42 The Council provides an adequate trade waste collection service. It provides a variety of containers ranging from 90 litre plastic bags to 30 cubic yard skips to suit customer needs. The Council has also introduced a paid for cardboard recycling collection service with these trade customers. In partnership with other Essex authorities, the Council has recently secured funding to target engagement with local business to help maximise diversion of trade waste from landfill.
- 43 Levels of litter, abandoned vehicles and graffiti are low, The Council's performance on street cleaning is in the top quartile nationally, with 7 per cent of land and highways assessed as having combined deposits of litter and detritus in 2004/05. Nevertheless, residents do express concern about graffiti, vandalism and abandoned vehicles, although there is little evidence of major problems. The Council has had some success in pursuing enforcement against offenders, particularly a successful prosecution for fly-tipping, which was widely reported in the local media. Even so, the Council recognises the need to consolidate the approach to enforcement corporately and work is underway to achieve this, with a review of its enforcement functions.
- 44 There are some aspects of the service that are not performing well. The tonnage of waste collected is among the worst performing councils, being 31,898 in 2003/04 and 32,155 in 2004/05; although both these figures are lower than for the previous three years.
- 45 Overall, the service shows good levels of public and user satisfaction, but it is below the national target for recycling and is in the poorest performing area for the amount of waste collected per head of population, despite some improvement in the last year. Moreover, the needs of the local community and users are not sought in a consistent and constructive way.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 46 Overall, the service cannot demonstrate a consistent approach to value for money (VFM). There has been no exploration of alternative methods of service delivery and all are delivered in-house. Costs for services are influenced both positively and negatively by contextual factors. However, the Council does not know to what extent these impact on the service as it has yet to conduct a review of value for money.

- 47 There is a lack of a systematic approach to VFM in service delivery and past decisions on waste collection have not provided VFM. The Council had a vision of a 'single pass' system for collection of dry recyclables and residual waste, using split body vehicles. With this in mind, it started a replacement programme in 2002 and by 2005 had seven such vehicles. However, this investment has been overtaken by the proposals in the new strategy, and these vehicles are no longer suitable. Although the vehicles are being sold, there is clearly a loss to the Council. As a consequence, local people have not benefited from past initiatives due, at least in part, to a lack of VFM considerations or any detailed cost benefit analysis.
- 48 Historically, the Council has not demonstrated VFM within the service. Street cleaning costs are comparatively low (£15.32 per household against £25.53 for English districts in 2004/05), but a best value review undertaken in 2002/03 has not resulted in any significant improvement in the service or improved value for money. There is no effective co-ordination between the roles undertaken by Uttlesford and the County Council on street cleaning-related services.
- 49 Some aspects of VFM did influence the options of moving to the new three-bin system. The Council did apply a VFM approach when deciding to bring the refuse team in-house, for instance through the opportunity to improve productivity by reconfiguring collection rounds. Cost projections suggest a net saving to council taxpayers across the county, as well as a reduction in the amount of waste to landfill. The report showed the impact of the various options on both the district council, as the collection authority, and Essex County Council as the disposal authority. For example, without changing the existing waste collection system the projected costs of paying to send waste to landfill is estimated at £1.75 million per year. The new system being implemented is estimated to reduce this future burden to around £350,000 per year, a significant reduction in future revenue costs.
- 50 The Council has embarked on an organisational re-engineering, with external advisors training appropriate staff to challenge processes and achieve efficiencies across all services. A potential saving of £200,000 per annum has been identified from this process.
- 51 Overall, it is not clear if costs are commensurate with performance and outcomes. The Council has not undertaken a comprehensive review of resources, productivity and the efficiency of activities to ensure that the Council's investment is value for money. Without a clear understanding of this, the Council cannot be sure by how much contextual factors influence costs either positively or negatively, if it needs to invest more or drive further efficiencies.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 52 There are promising prospects for improvement in the service. The Council has recognised the need for action in relation to waste management and recycling and has acted positively. In recent years, the service has taken steps to secure some reductions in the tonnage of waste collected and increase recycling and has now taken action to deliver further, more significant improvements.
- 53 Implementing the waste strategy is one of the Council's key priorities and it has taken bold action to improve performance. The introduction of a three-bin system (including a separation of kitchen waste) is designed to improve significantly the Council's recycling performance and reduce waste to landfill. It is resourced and the changes are well communicated to local people. This action reduces the costs to the County Council as waste disposal authority and supports the county-wide joint waste management strategy.
- 54 Through education and information, the Council increased the amount recycled from 16.67 per cent in 2002/03 to 25.59 per cent in 2005/06, although this still fell short of the target set nationally for Uttlesford of 30 per cent by 2005/06. The amount of kitchen waste collected under the former system (193 kg per household per annum) was many times higher than the average nationally. Through the new three-bin system of waste collection, plans are now in place to remove the high levels of kitchen waste to reduce the waste collected by an estimated 1,824 tonnes per year.
- 55 This action has been sanctioned in the knowledge that the cost of refuse collection is already above the median for all collection authorities (£43.36 in 2004/05 against a median of £40.96) and will increase further to £60.97 as a result of the investment in the new waste collection and recycling system. Nevertheless, the Council sees this as the most appropriate means of achieving one of its top priorities. Moreover, the new system will reduce substantially the future burden on the County Council in the costs of sending waste to landfill and in so doing contributes to the county-wide joint waste management strategy.

20 Waste Management and Street Scene | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 56 The project plan for introducing the new waste and recycling scheme has included the development and implementation of a discrete strategy for communicating with residents who will receive the service. A series of initiatives have been introduced to enable this, including:
- roadshows (on the theme of 'It's time to recycle more') at various locations across the district;
 - numerous presentations at public meetings across the district;
 - a dedicated recycling hotline;
 - home visits to those experiencing or likely to experience particular problems with the scheme; and
 - questionnaires to residents during each phase of the roll-out, so that future phases can be tailored more closely to users' needs.
- 57 The roll-out is planned over a five-month period and these actions have enabled the Council to ensure that residents receive information at the most appropriate time, ie when the new scheme impacts directly on them.
- 58 The Council uses external challenge well to improve service delivery. Recognising the need to improve performance in these areas more swiftly, and to challenge existing collection methods, the Council brought in the services of an independent consultant, initially with a view to procure a new contract for refuse collection and recycling. Initial work showed the need for a radical change from a single pass system to a three-bin system. Despite this being a difficult decision against high levels of investment on the single pass system, the Council has taken all the recommendations from the report and is implementing them successfully in the early phases. For example, initial tonnages of kitchen waste collected during the first two phases show 450 tonnes less going into landfill during the month of July 2006, compared to the previous year. These amounts are well within the forecast figures and suggest that this new system if implemented correctly will help the Council to achieve its recycling and waste minimisation targets.
- 59 The Council can demonstrate its ability to plan for improvement effectively. Corporately, and in response to external reports, the Council has started to focus over the last year on implementing key building blocks to support continuous improvement and improve outcomes for its community. Initiatives are being led from the top of the organisation, involving both members and officers as a means of securing implementation of the corporate plan priorities, namely dealing with proposals for the expansion of Stansted Airport; recycling; integrated customer management; and community focus/user engagement. These priorities impact heavily on environmental services, but much of the action is in the relatively early stages and has not impacted significantly at this stage.

- 60** To support the priorities, the Council is pursuing a corporate focus on seven identified areas, namely:
- strategic partnerships;
 - sustainability;
 - procurement;
 - affordable housing;
 - ensuring continuity of service delivery from 2007 onwards;
 - people performance and accountability; and
 - equalities and diversity.
- 61** Within the waste management service, strong project planning is evident. This has been introduced to ensure a smooth transition towards the significant change in the way that the service is provided. Rolling out a new three-bin system to 30,000 households over a five-month period, and on the basis of a new in-house service, requires careful planning. Project planning and management is sound, with detailed actions and milestones, a communication strategy and a cross-party joint member/officer group meeting regularly to assess progress and respond to problems and queries. Project risk and actions are clearly logged and acted on through a dedicated project manager. This has led to an efficient and effective rollout of phase one with the capture of lessons that is being transferred through to the other four phases of the project.
- 62** The waste service can already demonstrate improvements in the way the service is delivered, although it is too early for improvements to be reflected on audited best value performance indicators (BVPIs).

How well does the service manage performance?

- 63** The service's positive approach to performance management is demonstrated by its performance indicators. The performance track record against all key BVPIs is positive when compared to similar authorities. Recycling/composting rates have increased from 20 per cent in 2003/04 to 23.34 per cent in 2004/05. Unaudited data shows that recycling/composting increased to almost 26 per cent for 2005/06. Almost 97 per cent of residents receive a kerbside recycling collection service and plans are in place to increase this to 100 per cent. For 2004/05 the percentage of land and highways assessed as having combined deposits of litter and detritus is at 7 per cent, among the best performing councils. However, this is 2 per cent worse than 2003/04. Satisfaction with waste collection, recycling and street cleanliness is good when compared to other councils with all three indicators in the top quartile. However, the weight of waste collected per head of population is at 458 kilograms per head of population in 2005/06, poor when compared to other similar councils.

22 Waste Management and Street Scene | What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 64 The Council's waste management strategy provides a clear vision for the service. It aims to improve the service and address current weaknesses by enhancing the recycling rate well beyond the current nationally set target of 30 per cent to a figure closer to 50 per cent and, at the same time, reduce significantly the amount of waste sent to landfill. The implementation of the new scheme clearly demonstrates the Council's intent.
- 65 The new constitution has placed a greater emphasis on the scrutiny role. Performance is now being regularly reported to Performance Select Committee, together with performance improvement plans, and that committee has also undertaken a review of risk management arrangements.
- 66 Performance management across the organisation as a whole is showing improvement, but focus on value for money and effective challenge is under-developed. Along with the introduction of new software for performance management, the Council has taken an important step forward with the introduction of improvement plans for poorly performing areas, which are reported to both executive management team and elected members with the above improvement planning where underperformance is evident. These reports include action to improve council tax collection, which has now moved to top quartile. Continuation of this approach will assist in improving services for the benefit of residents.
- 67 Strategic and service planning is improving. A new process was introduced for 2006/07 which involved service plan pre-assessments for consideration by members to identify potential spending pressures in September. At that stage, the Resources Committee agreed a strategy for spending pressures and savings, based on a service prioritisation process undertaken by a member working group set up for the purpose. Savings and income targets were fed into the approved budget, with detailed service plans being prepared after completion of the budget process. This process provided a greater focus on priority planning and enabled a better distribution of resource to meet these priorities.
- 68 There is good integration between plans, although outcomes are not always clearly articulated. Service planning actions are not referenced to outcomes. For instance, targets relating to promotional events tend to relate to the number of events rather than to what benefits the public will receive from them. Internally, there are no targets for securing waste minimisation and recycling at the Council's own premises and, although action has been taken to encourage recycling within the Council offices, the absence of targets makes it difficult to determine the success or otherwise of these actions.
- 69 The Council has aspirations to develop partnerships with others, including local authorities and voluntary organisations, such as enhancement of the current level of service for recycling clothes. Close working with a neighbouring authority has secured competitive rates for disposal of recyclables and the Council continues to investigate partnership working across a range of services. Coupled with successful areas such as glass recycling where some 1,426 tonnes per annum are secured from the 57 bring - sites, this indicates that continuous improvement is becoming embedded in the service.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 70** The Council has the capacity to deliver further improvements to the service and continues to put in place building blocks to secure improvements not only in this service, but corporately. Although there is much still to do, the indications are positive.
- 71** There is a clear commitment to improvement with investment in better corporate systems and procedures. The Council has invested in corporate capacity by way of new systems to improve strategic performance and enhance the service to residents. Initiatives include:
- a new customer management system is being developed to provide a more efficient service to users of all council services. This is on target with protocols and standard responses being finalised ready for the rollout. The first phase is due to be completed by October 2006, with environmental services within that phase;
 - the Council has put in place a programme of organisational review. External advisors have been commissioned to introduce the approach to the review and to train the Council's own team to permanently maintain the challenge of its processes and achieve efficiencies. The work was initiated in early 2006;
 - the Council is developing its approach to corporate communications. A new post of Communications Manager is being filled, with responsibility for developing a new corporate communications and consultation strategy. This will enhance the service to residents and contribute towards meeting one of the Council's corporate priorities; and
 - the Council is strengthening its approach to risk management, which has been reviewed by the Performance Select Committee. It has acquired a risk management module as an attachment to its performance management system. All committee reports now contain risk management elements, although there is still a need to ensure a consistent use of risk management across the organisation.

Each of these initiatives is designed to address acknowledged shortcomings and, consequently, provide better services to local people.

- 72** The Council has a clear plan for improving services, in line with corporate priorities. 'Implementing the Corporate Plan' sets out the way forward. Each area has an identified member champion and lead executive manager, as well as other supporting officers. Corporate planning worksheets have been developed for the themes and identify key actions and activities, with key milestones to mark progress. Examples include the establishment of a customer service centre to deal with 80 per cent of all council enquiries at first point of contact and the development of management in relation to performance improvement, and staff, property and finance management. With this new approach to delivering corporate priorities, the Council will be able to develop stronger and clearer leadership and promote a culture of learning across the organisation.

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- 73 The Council's procurement strategy is out-of-date and steps have been taken to develop a new procurement strategy, as part of a shared service with neighbouring councils, including funding of £70,000 from the Regional Centre of Excellence. The strategy is to be implemented across the organisation over a period of time and will improve the Council's procurement arrangements. This will enable the Council to procure services more effectively contributing towards better VFM.
- 74 The Council has taken bold steps to ensure that the service improves. In adopting and implementing its waste management strategy, it is investing heavily in the service, with the specific intention of raising recycling levels well above the current statutory target and to reduce significantly the amount of waste generated and sent to landfill. The absence of a medium-term financial strategy provides an element of risk in that, amongst other things, the impact of the investment in waste management on the funding of other council services is not clearly spelled out. Nevertheless, the actions being taken should provide a considerable boost to the effectiveness of the service.
- 75 The management structure for the service has been enhanced to cope with the implementation of the new waste strategy. As part of the reintroduction of an in-house workforce to undertake waste collection and recycling, the management structure has been strengthened and dedicated resources are being provided to give HR and health and safety support to the enlarged in-house team. This approach has been well received and has helped to ensure that the workforce is integrated back into the Council. An in-house workforce also provides the Council with more flexibility in considering future options for the service.
- 76 The necessary finance has been provided in order to meet the cost of introducing the new system. The Council has invested £3.27 million in the introduction of the three-bin system, including £1.4 million for wheeled bins and £1.87 million for new vehicles. Funding has also been approved of an additional £420,000 per annum in revenue expenditure, together with £300,000 one-off costs for implementation of new recycling arrangements. Estimates of the one-off and ongoing costs were based on the experiences of similar councils and with external consultancy advice. All of the costs were built into the Council's budget report in February 2006 and has ensured that the necessary financial support and funding is in place.
- 77 The performance of the street cleaning service is within top quartile, but nevertheless the Council sees prospects for improving the service and is looking to undertake a further review. It has budgeted to meet the cost of an independent assessment of the service during the current financial year, following on from the introduction of the three-bin waste collection system. If the opportunity is taken to use the experience of external advisers together with the local knowledge of current operatives, and appropriate consultation, the service can be enhanced for the benefit of the local community, despite it being in top quartile already for the amount of litter and detritus in the area.

Appendix 1 – Judgements

- The descriptors for judgement one scores have been agreed by the Local Services Inspectorate Forum (LSIF). Members are the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Audit Commission, the Office for Standards in Education, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Fire Services Inspectorate, Department for Education and Skills and the Healthcare Commission.

Judgement 1 – How good is the service?

| Score | AC labels and stars | LSIF descriptors |
|-------|---------------------|---|
| 4 | Excellent ☆☆☆ | A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users, is highly cost-effective and fully contributes to the achievement of wider outcomes for the community. |
| 3 | Good ☆☆ | A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users, is cost-effective and makes contributions to wider outcomes for the community. |
| 2 | Fair ☆ | A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users and is not especially cost-effective, nor contributes significantly to wider outcomes for the community. |
| 1 | Poor (0 stars) | A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users, is not cost-effective and makes little or no contribution to wider outcomes for the community. |

Judgement 2 – Prospects for improvement

| Score | AC labels | Descriptors |
|-------|---------------------|---|
| 4 | Excellent prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity well above the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money. Few, if any, barriers to improvement exist. |
| 3 | Promising prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity consistently above the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money. Enablers of improvement strongly outweigh barriers to improvement. |
| 2 | Uncertain prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity such that delivery of continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money is uncertain. Enablers of, and barriers to, improvement are finely balanced. |
| 1 | Poor prospects | A service with improvement arrangements and capacity that do not meet the minimum requirements needed to deliver continuous improvements in outcomes for users and/or the wider community and in value for money. Either barriers to improvement strongly outweigh enablers of improvement, or few, if any, enablers of improvement are in place. |