

APPENDIX D

BEST VALUE FULL INSPECTION REPORT STREET CLEANSING AND RECYCLING

Guildford Borough Council

Street Cleansing and Recycling Service

March 2002

Best Value

The Government has placed a duty of best value on local authorities to deliver services to clear standards – of cost and quality – by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. ¹Best value is a challenging new performance framework that requires authorities to publish annual best value performance plans and review all of their services every five years.

Authorities must show that they have applied the 4Cs of best value to every review:

- ◆ **challenging** why and how a service is being provided;
- ◆ **comparing** their performance with others' (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors);
- ◆ embracing fair **competition** as a means of securing efficient and effective services; and
- ◆ **consulting** with local taxpayers, customers and the wider business community.

Authorities must demonstrate to local people that they are achieving continuous improvement in all of their services. The Government has decided that each council should be scrutinised by an independent inspectorate, so that the public will know whether best value is being achieved. The purpose of the inspection and of this report is to:

- ◆ enable the public to see whether best value is being delivered;
- ◆ enable the Council to see how well it is doing;
- ◆ enable the Government to see how well its policies are working on the ground;
- ◆ identify failing services where remedial action may be necessary; and
- ◆ identify and disseminate best practice.

¹ This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission ('the Commission') following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

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Summary and recommendations

Summary

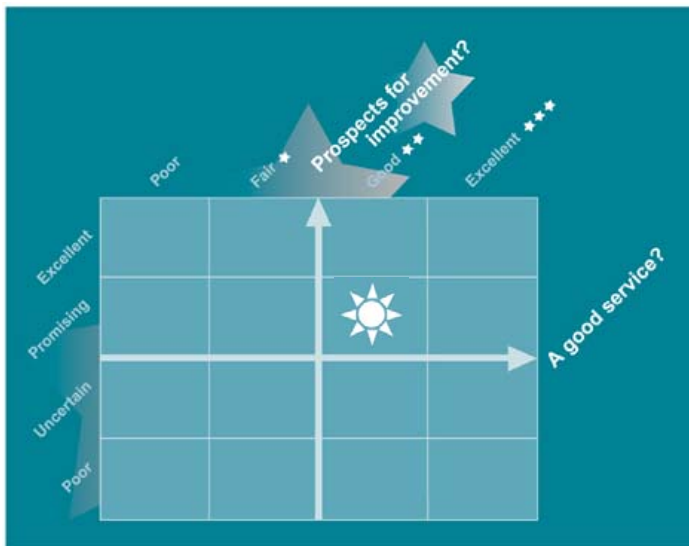
- 1 Guildford is a major centre for commerce, entertainment, retail and education in Surrey. The borough covers 104 square miles and has a population of 129,000. There is a large influx of visitors to the area on a daily basis. Approximately half of the population lives in the town of Guildford and half in neighbouring towns and villages. Unemployment is low at around 0.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent.
- 2 There is no overall political control of the Council, which has 45 councillors representing 21 wards. The Council has a net expenditure of around £13 million (2001/02).
- 3 Our inspection of Guildford Borough Council took place in December 2001, when we inspected the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service, which is delivered by an in-house team.
- 4 The net expenditure on street cleaning services is £1,153,000 (2001/02). The services cover 414 miles of highways and footpaths and include:
 - ◆ street sweeping and litter picking;
 - ◆ provision and emptying of litter bins;
 - ◆ removal of fallen leaves;
 - ◆ removal of fly-tipped waste and abandoned cars; and
 - ◆ the annual cleaning of bus shelters and street signs.
- 5 The net expenditure on recycling services is £634,950 (2001/02). The services include the provision of:
 - ◆ 60 recycling centres;
 - ◆ kerbside collection of recyclable materials to most of the borough;
 - ◆ trial kerbside collection of green garden waste;
 - ◆ a garden waste shredding service;
 - ◆ promotion of recycling; and
 - ◆ a free cardboard and office paper recycling service to the Council's commercial customers.

Guildford Borough Council is currently preparing a joint municipal waste management strategy with other Surrey councils.

Scoring the Service

- 6 We have assessed the 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.

Scoring chart²: Guildford Borough Council – Street Cleansing and Recycling Service



‘a good service that has promising prospects for improvement’

- 7 We have judged the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service as **good**, because it has a number of positive features.
- 8 For the Street Cleansing Service we found that:
- ◆ The streets are generally of acceptable levels of cleanliness and kept clean in accordance with the national code of practice.
 - ◆ Street cleaning teams and activities are highly visible throughout the borough, with resources concentrated in hot spots.
 - ◆ Leaves are composted, supporting the Council’s recycling aims.

² 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 Council has carried out specific initiatives to tackle graffiti in response to community safety concerns.
- ◆ The Council has recruited 230 volunteer community representatives who report incidents or problems to the Council such as fly-tipped waste, graffiti or other street cleaning matters.
- ◆ The Government and the Council have set challenging targets for the Street Cleansing Service that address day-to-day operational issues.
- ◆ The Council has developed clear aims for the Street Cleansing Service that support its strategic priorities of:
 - ◆ enhancing the quality of Guildford's natural environment;
 - ◆ creating a safe borough; and
 - ◆ sustainability.
- ◆ The Service compares favourably with other councils in terms of customer satisfaction.

9 With regard to Recycling we found that:

- ◆ The Council provides a range of recycling services, including a kerbside collection for householders and a free service to its commercial customers.
- ◆ The Council is developing a number of green waste initiatives, including a trial kerbside collection of green waste, subsidised home composting and a composting demonstration centre.
- ◆ The recycling bank sites we visited were clean, well maintained and not overflowing.
- ◆ The Council has produced a recycling directory, which is reproduced on its website.
- ◆ The Recycling Service has revised its aims to reflect new Government targets. These aims are challenging because they are more demanding than national targets.

10 For the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service overall we found that:

- ◆ Good management practice – such as strong performance management and tracking – underpinned the delivery of the service. Staff were clear what was expected of them, communication was good throughout the Department, with regular team briefings and meetings. Staff received regular appraisals.
- ◆ There are written procedures for all key activities, helping staff deliver an effective service.
- ◆ The Service has effective and dedicated hotlines for complaints, incidents and enquiries and records and uses information to monitor performance.

11 However, there are some significant areas that it needs to address:

- ◆ The aims of the Street Cleansing Service do not extend beyond the next few years. There is no long-term view of how the Service will develop and what the longer-term priorities are.
- ◆ The Council does not emphasise the importance of proactive measures such as enforcement and the balance between enforcement and educational activities.
- ◆ There is no explanation of how the Service supports the Council's strategic priority of promoting a flourishing business community by contributing to a clean and pleasant environment for shoppers.
- ◆ The Council has not considered the role of commercial waste collection relating to the other waste services and the impact that it could have on:
 - ◆ recycling; or
 - ◆ income generation to support other services.
- ◆ The Council takes a long time to deal with fly-tipped waste compared with other councils.
- ◆ The cost of street cleaning is higher than for similar councils and is among the highest nationally.

12 We have judged the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service as having promising prospects for improvement because:

- ◆ The Council approached the best value review in a very positive way and involved staff and councillors in all stages of the review.
- ◆ The Council used a range of consultation techniques to gauge the opinions of residents and other stakeholders in order to identify areas for improvement in the Service.
- ◆ The Council visited other councils to identify good practice and has adopted initiatives used by others in order to improve its own Service.
- ◆ The improvement plans for the Service address many operational improvements, including the purchase of new vehicles and equipment and the replacement of litter bins.
- ◆ The Council has a track record of delivering high performing services and of delivering a responsive street cleaning and recycling service.
- ◆ The Council has already implemented some of the proposals in the improvement plan that followed the review.
- ◆ The Council has a number of strengths that will help it to improve the Service. These include commitment and enthusiasm among managers and staff and a general acceptance that the Council will continue to provide financial resources for the expansion of these services.

13 However, there are aspects that require further attention:

- ◆ The Council has not established a long-term strategy for the development of the Service that would help it respond to future challenges that it will face locally and from national change agendas.
- ◆ The Council's review did not fundamentally challenge whether the Service could provide better value for money, or focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the current Service.
- ◆ The review looked at the Service in isolation from the closely related refuse collection service.
- ◆ The improvement plan does not address how the Service will become one of the best 25 per cent in the country.
- ◆ The Council has no clear plan of action for testing the competitiveness of the Service.

- ◆ Proposals in the improvement plan:
 - ◆ are not prioritised;
 - ◆ are not measurable;
 - ◆ are not costed; and
 - ◆ have a variable approach to setting targets.

Recommendations

14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team feels that the Council should now take action to resolve a number of general issues.

15 We recommend that the Council should:

- ◆ improve the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service to residents and other stakeholders, by:
 - ◆ developing a consistent approach to enforcement and education that sets out what action it will take under what circumstances, and clarifies the relationship between enforcement and promotional activities;
 - ◆ working with the Council's contractors to reduce the amount of time taken to remove fly-tipped waste; and
 - ◆ achieving recycling targets by continuing to expand the range and volume of recycling services;
- ◆ demonstrate the cost effectiveness of the Service, by:
 - ◆ developing a firm plan of action to test the competitiveness of the Service to identify the steps it should take, with a clear timetable for implementation;
 - ◆ identifying the potential of the commercial waste collection service to generate income to support service development; and
- ◆ continue to improve the Service by establishing clear long-term objectives so that it becomes one of the best 25 per cent in the country.

- 16 We would like to thank the staff of Guildford Borough Council, in particular David Searle, James Whiteman and the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service staff, who made us welcome and met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Guildford High Street



The Council

19 The Council comprises 45 councillors representing 21 wards. No party has overall control. The current breakdown of seats is:

- ◆ 19 Liberal Democrat;
- ◆ 17 Conservative;
- ◆ 6 Labour; and
- ◆ 3 independent.

20 The Council's net expenditure for the year 2001/02 is approximately £13 million.

21 The Council's mission statement is:

'We are committed to be the Local Government of Guildford, providing high quality and good value services to meet the needs of the local community'.

Its strategic priorities are:

'Building on the strengths of Guildford's communities and working in partnership with them to enhance the quality of life for all residents, workers, and visitors, with particular emphasis on:

Improving the well being of our whole community

Continuing to promote key areas of the Council's policy

Focusing on transport'

22 The Council aims to be:

- ◆ 'A Communicating Authority
- ◆ A Partnership Authority
- ◆ A Responsive Authority
- ◆ A Community Orientated Authority
- ◆ A Challenging Authority'.

The Council's best value review

23 The Council undertook this review to 'determine whether Guildford's Street Cleansing and Recycling services are economic, efficient and effective in meeting the needs of the Borough and in their contribution to the core values and strategic priorities of the Council'.

24 Originally, the two reviews were separate but, in the later stages, were brought together. The Council had planned to carry out the reviews in 2000/01 but actually started them in 1999. This was because of some concerns over the Refuse Collection Service and a desire to advance recycling more quickly.

- 25 The reviews produced an improvement plan for each of the two Services. The improvement plan for the Street Cleansing Service includes proposals for action through to 2003/04. These proposals include:
- ◆ a commitment to carry out further review activities of, for example:
 - ◆ litter bin provision;
 - ◆ cleaning of bus shelters; and
 - ◆ vehicles;
 - ◆ the introduction of new services or extension of existing services such as:
 - ◆ abandoned vehicles;
 - ◆ fly-tipping;
 - ◆ graffiti; and
 - ◆ weekend cleaning;
 - ◆ internal organisational improvements such as:
 - ◆ increased communication;
 - ◆ increased supervision;
 - ◆ risk assessments; and
 - ◆ measures to address recruitment and retention.
- 26 The improvement plan for the Recycling Service includes proposals for action through to 2004/05. These include:
- ◆ a commitment to carry out further review activities; for example:
 - ◆ researching best practice;
 - ◆ consultation; and
 - ◆ reviewing the provision of recycling collection centres;

- ◆ the introduction of new services, such as:
 - ◆ green garden waste collection;
 - ◆ weekly kerbside collection of recyclable materials;
 - ◆ composting demonstration project; and
 - ◆ supporting voluntary sector projects;
- ◆ commitments to develop strategic plans for recycling, such as:
 - ◆ a recycling plan;
 - ◆ a municipal waste plan; and
 - ◆ exploring Surrey contractors as alternative outlets for recyclable materials.

27 A Best Value Working Group of councillors agreed the improvement plan in October 2001. The review specifically considered competition and concluded that 'it would not be an appropriate time to go out to tender but should be reconsidered later with the refuse contract in due course...and once recycling has developed a more settled programme'.

The Street Cleansing Service

- 28 The Service operates under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which gives councils a duty to clear litter from roads, car parks, footpaths and other council land. The Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions (DTLR) Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse requires councils to set response times for clearing litter from different zones including town centres, residential areas and rural roads.
- 29 The net expenditure on the Street Cleansing Service is £1,153,000 in 2001/02. This represents 8.8 per cent of the Council's total net expenditure. The Street Cleansing Service covers 414 miles of highways and footpaths and delivers services such as:
- ◆ street sweeping and litter picking;
 - ◆ provision and emptying of litter bins;
 - ◆ removal of fallen leaves;
 - ◆ removal of fly-tipped waste and abandoned cars; and
 - ◆ annual cleaning of bus shelters and street signs.

30 The Council's mission statement for the Street Cleansing Service is:

'By using best practice we will achieve the highest standards of service provision possible in relation to cleansing services for the residents of Guildford.'

31 The Service is managed within the Services Group, which in turn is part of the Council's Department of Environment and Planning Services.

32 The service last went to tender in 1994. The Council's Direct Service Organisation won the contract against private sector competition. The contract ended in 2000 but has continued to operate in-house since then.

The Recycling Service

33 The Government has set councils specific recycling targets. The Government's targets for Guildford Borough Council are:

- ◆ 14 per cent by 2003/04; and
- ◆ 21 per cent by 2005/06.

34 The Council has set its own targets that exceed those set by the Government. These are:

- ◆ 14 per cent by 2001/02
- ◆ 19 per cent by 2002/03
- ◆ 22 per cent by 2003/04
- ◆ 25 per cent by 2004/05
- ◆ 60 per cent (inc home composting) by 2010

35 represents 4.9 per cent of the Council's total net expenditure. The services include:

- ◆ 60 recycling centres;
- ◆ kerbside collection of recyclables to most of the borough;
- ◆ trial kerbside collection of green garden waste;
- ◆ a garden waste shredding service;
- ◆ promotion of recycling; and
- ◆ a free cardboard and office paper recycling service to the Council's commercial customers.

Nippy Chipper garden waste shredding service



- 36 A predominantly in-house team delivers the service. The staff includes both direct employees of the Council and agency staff. The Council has a number of contracts for the emptying of its recycling banks and for the recycling of the materials collected from households and its business customers.
- 37 The Recycling Service operates under the refuse service contract, which will expire in 2003.
- 38 The Council is currently preparing a joint municipal waste management strategy with other Surrey councils.

How good is the Service?

- 39 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 40 Challenge is the key to achieving significant improvements in performance and targets set by the Council and Government. Without challenge best value will be ineffective. It requires the Council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.

The Street Cleansing Service

- 41 The objectives of the Street Cleansing Service appear in the financial estimates book and in the Council's best value review document. These two lists of objectives differ slightly but broadly cover the same issues. The objectives – as set out in the best value review document – are:
- ◆ 'To meet the requirements of the public for all cleansing services by providing the best possible service to all our customers.
 - ◆ To reduce the number of service errors on a continual basis by monitoring complaints and by identifying corrective and preventative measures.
 - ◆ To ensure the best possible use of all available resources.
 - ◆ To meet all targets set by both the Council and the Government.
 - ◆ To retain accreditation for ISO 9002 and to consistently review and improve procedures for all service areas.
 - ◆ To ensure that all operations comply with all legislative requirements.

- ◆ To continue to consult with both the public and staff with a view to providing the best possible services to the community and to introduce and work with relevant working groups with a view to implementing change.
 - ◆ To ensure that all services meet their financial objectives on an annual on-going basis.
 - ◆ To promote actively, the ideals and expectations of the Council's Investors in People accreditation (IIP) by recognising need and investing in the training and development of employees throughout the section.
 - ◆ To constantly review and address the issue of staff retention and recruitment.
 - ◆ To constantly review and manage sickness and attendance in accordance with the Council's policies.
 - ◆ To ensure that communication with staff and the public is always clear and effective with a view to promoting new initiatives and general co-operation with service provision.' (Best Value Review of Street Cleansing and Recycling Services)
- 42 The best value review document highlights how these objectives support the Council's strategic priorities relating to creating a safe borough, sustainability and enhancing the quality of Guildford's natural environment. These links are appropriate because:
- ◆ Excess litter and graffiti can adversely affect people's perceptions of safety.
 - ◆ The choice of fuel and cleaning chemicals used in the Street Cleansing Service and the way that the collected waste is disposed of has AN environmental impact.
 - ◆ The quality of the natural environment can be reduced through the accumulation of, for example, fly-tipped waste and abandoned vehicles.
- 43 However, these objectives do not explain how the Street Cleansing Service supports the Council's strategic priority relating to promoting a flourishing business community. A large part of Guildford's status as a business community is its role as a major retail centre for the area. The cleanliness of the streets can have a direct impact on shoppers' perceptions and therefore can either support or undermine Guildford's status as a major retail centre. This is a significant omission from the aims for the Service.
- 44 The Council has set itself specific targets for the Street Cleansing Service that are based on national performance indicators for cleanliness of highways and the time taken to remove fly-tipped waste. These targets are challenging because they are in excess of what it is currently achieving.

- 45 However, there are no specific aims or targets that set out how the Council will approach enforcement and education relating to street cleaning – such as identifying their importance and the results the Council would like to see. This is a significant omission as staff and members of the public that we spoke to identified enforcement as a high priority.
- 46 The aims for the Service do not extend beyond the next two years and there is therefore no long-term view of how the service will develop and what the longer-term priorities are.
- 47 The lack of forward planning means that the Service has a reactive approach, rather than a proactive one. The development of an education and enforcement strategy would be an example of a proactive approach, and would deal with some of the root causes of graffiti and fly-tipping.
- 48 If longer-term aims were set, this would answer questions such as:
- ◆ How clean does the Council want streets to be?
 - ◆ Is the Council trying to proactively reduce the amount of waste produced by businesses – such as takeaways – that ends up as litter?
 - ◆ If there is a need for financial savings, which parts of the service are priorities?

The Recycling Service

- 49 The aims for the Recycling Service appear in the Council's recycling plan. They include commitments to extend kerbside collection of recyclables throughout the borough, increase participation in composting schemes and promote recycling and composting.
- 50 In 2000 the Government set specific recycling targets for all councils in England and Wales.³ The Council's targets are 14 per cent by 2003/04 and 21 per cent by 2004/05. Although these are lower than those that the Council set itself in its recycling plan (25 per cent by 2004/05 and 60 per cent – including composting – by 2010), the Council has retained its original target but has also reflected the Government targets in its plans for recycling.
- 51 The current objectives for the Recycling Service appear in the Council's financial estimates book:

³ "Guidance on Municipal Waste Strategies" March 2001 Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions: London

- ◆ 'To investigate and identify best practice in other local authorities and organisations and devise processes appropriate for Guildford Borough.
 - ◆ To investigate and develop increased co-operation with other relevant authorities and organisations.
 - ◆ To encourage partnership working and working with the community.
 - ◆ To consider future promotion, publicity and education in relation to recycling.
 - ◆ To investigate potential sources of funding.
 - ◆ To demonstrate standards by ensuring that the Council "leads from the front".
 - ◆ To identify local markets for recycled materials.' (Financial Estimates Book)
- 52 The aims for the Recycling Service do not extend beyond 2004/05. However, the Council is currently working with Surrey County Council and the other district councils of Surrey to develop a joint municipal waste management strategy that will address this issue.
- 53 Since our inspection, the Council has prepared a draft recycling education strategy. It sets out the key messages that the Council wants to deliver and the ways in which it intends to do so.
- 54 In conclusion, our view is that the aims for the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service are clear. Street Cleansing has challenging targets that address day-to-day operational issues. However, they lack a longer-term outlook and do not emphasise the importance of proactive measures such as enforcement and education. The aims for the Recycling Service are challenging and the Council's targets exceed the Government's targets for Guildford.
- 55 This clarity made it easy to assess how well the service was delivering against these items. This is discussed in the next section.

Does the Service meet these aims?

- 56 Having considered the aims the Council has set for the Service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the Council is performing in meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the Council's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it sets out to do.

The Street Cleansing Service

57 We visited a number of sites throughout the borough at different times of day and recorded any incidences of litter. We later re-visited these sites to check that the litter had been cleaned in accordance with the code of practice (see paragraph 27). In all cases we found that the streets were of acceptable levels of cleanliness as defined by the code. Incidents of littering that we found were returned to acceptable levels within the timescales set by the code.

London Road, Guildford



- 58 The Council's zoning plan sets out the cleaning response times for different types of roads. We found this was up to date and was regularly reviewed.
- 59 We often saw Council cleaning staff at work. The rapid response vehicle was operating in the town centre and street sweepers were active throughout the borough. This high visibility and constant presence in hot spots allows the Council to respond to litter very quickly and to deter further littering. Residents told us that the high visibility of street cleaning activities is important to them
- 60 The Council has recruited 230 volunteer community representatives who report to the Council incidents or problems such as fly-tipped waste, graffiti or other street cleaning matters. This initiative – known as the Community Action Programme – is effective because it helps the Council to quickly identify problems and incidents and involves local people in the process.

- 61 they are composted. This is a good initiative as it reduces the amount of waste that is disposed of in landfill sites and it is consistent with the Council's aims relating to sustainable development. In November 2001, 69 tonnes of green sweepings were recycled in this way and contributed to the Council's overall recycling achievements.
- 62 The Council has carried out a series of initiatives that focused on tackling graffiti. This was in response to research by the Council into people's perceptions of crime and safety, which identified graffiti as something that lessened people's feelings of safety and security. The Council has invested in special cleaning equipment to remove graffiti. It has also publicised the problem of graffiti and invited the public to report incidents through the Street Cleansing hotline. Though this work had led to a higher level of recording of graffiti incidents, the Council feels that this greater level of awareness and propensity to report graffiti is a very positive outcome and leads to it being able to remove graffiti more quickly.
- 63 The Council operates a fleet of rapid response vehicles, which are able to deal quickly with small amounts of fly-tipped waste and general litter. Larger fly-tips take much longer to remove, as the Council has to make special arrangements with the landfill site operator on each occasion, before they can be accepted for disposal. Although the Council has taken steps to reduce the time this takes, there are still significant delays, resulting in large fly-tips taking longer to remove.
- 64 We saw a large fly-tip during our first day of inspection and reported it to the Street Cleansing hotline at 8am on the Monday. Although we were aware that the Council was taking steps to have the fly-tip removed during the course of the week, it was still there on the Friday afternoon.

A fly-tip at White Lane, near Tongham - Friday 14 December 2001 2pm



- 65 We found examples of promotional work that the Council had undertaken such as a Litter Free Borough Campaign and a Litter Free Schools competition. The Council has also entered into partnership with specific fast food outlets to provide extra cleaning in their vicinity. These initiatives support the Council's objectives for the Street Cleansing Service.
- 66 However, we found that the Council had no clear approach to enforcement or to the relationship between enforcement and education. Most staff and many customers that we spoke to felt that these are the best tools that the Council has to tackle problems of littering, graffiti and fly tipping. Since our inspection the Council has taken steps to develop an enforcement policy that will help to address this shortcoming.

The Recycling Service

- 67 The Council has introduced a kerbside collection scheme that allows householders to recycle paper, cans and glass. The inclusion of glass recycling in a kerbside collection scheme is not common for this type of service and was introduced in response to the wishes of householders. A Council survey in October 2000 found that 80 per cent of its customers rated the green box service as good or excellent.
- 68 We visited many of the Council's recycling sites and found them to be clean, well maintained and not overflowing. There are 60 sites and they include facilities to recycle newspapers, magazines, cans, textiles, glass and plastic bottles.

- 69 The Council has introduced a number of other recycling services including:
- ◆ a trial kerbside collection of green waste;
 - ◆ subsidised home composters; and
 - ◆ a composting demonstration project.
- 70 This emphasis on separating green waste from other refuse and composting is good because there are national targets to phase out the disposal in landfill sites of garden waste, food and other biodegradable wastes.
- 71 The Council also supports the Guildford Association of Voluntary Services by providing storage facilities at its depot.
- 72 The Council collects refuse from a number of commercial waste customers such as shops and offices. It offers these customers a free collection of cardboard and office paper for recycling. Business people we spoke to felt that this was a good service that helps the Council to encourage good practice in the business sector.
- 73 Although the Council collects recyclable materials from commercial customers free of charge, it derives income from these customers via the refuse collection service. This income significantly offsets the cost to council tax payers of the other waste services including street cleaning and recycling.
- 74 However, we found that the Council had not considered whether it wished to expand this market or increase the income from it.
- 75 The Council has taken steps to promote its recycling services widely through a recycling directory sent to all households in the borough and which appears on the Council's website:
www.guildford.gov.uk/pages/environ/amenities/recycle.htm
- 76 However, we found that this information was not available at key information points such as Guildford library.

General

- 77 We found many examples of good management practice that underpinned the delivery of the service. For example, we found that the Council had set its own targets for the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service that were based on nationally available performance indicators. The Council had also derived its own local performance indicators in some areas. This information was used at an operational level; for example, to keep track of progress on recycling and identify specific problems such as the time taken to deal with fly-tipped waste. Performance information was also reported in less detail to councillors so that they could keep track of how well the Service was performing.
- 78 We found that all staff had received regular appraisals. This helped them to be clear about what was expected of them and allowed them to feed back concerns and ideas to their managers. Other examples of how the managers of the Service ensured good communication among staff include team briefings and meetings.
- 79 The Council has written procedures for all of the key activities carried out by the Street Cleansing and Recycling staff. Staff who were new to their roles told us that this was useful as it helped them to quickly establish what they were supposed to do and how to do it, and so helped with the efficient and effective delivery of the Service.
- 80 We found many examples of training opportunities being offered throughout the Service. These included management training and specific courses on matters such as health and safety, dealing with abandoned vehicles and HGV driver training. This last initiative is particularly useful as there is a national shortage of trained HGV drivers and the Council is seeking to ensure that it has enough staff who are qualified to drive its vehicles.
- 81 The Street Cleansing and Recycling Service has dedicated telephone hotlines to receive complaints, reports of incidents and enquiries. When we contacted the hotlines we found the staff courteous and knowledgeable. Managers record information on the nature and numbers of calls and use it to monitor performance. However, staff told us that calls received by staff other than the hotline staff were not necessarily recorded in this way. This means that managers do not always have full information on which to base their decisions.
- 82 In conclusion, the evidence suggests that the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service is generally performing well in terms of the service that it provides to residents, customers and other stakeholders. This is supported by strong day-to-day performance management. There are, however, problems with responding rapidly to fly-tipped waste and an absence of a clear approach to deterring littering and graffiti through enforcement and education.

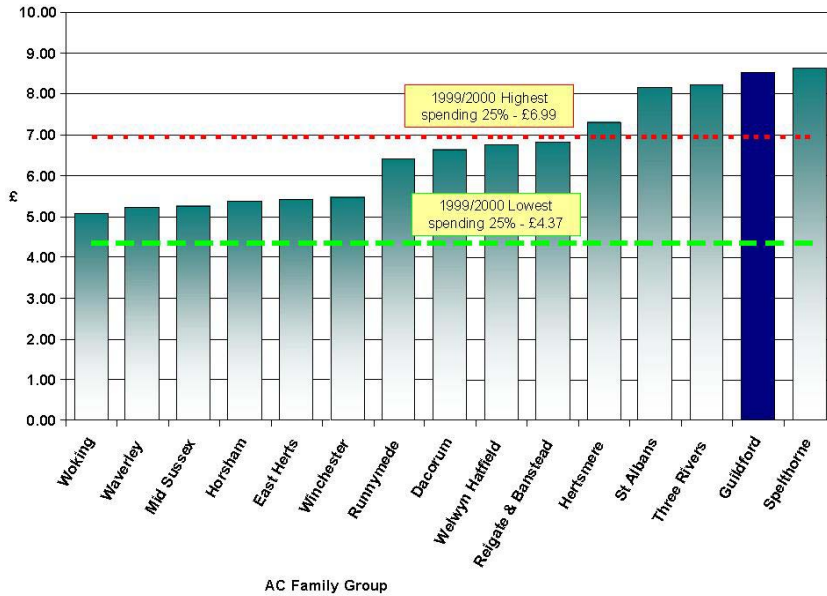
How does the performance compare?

- 83 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 84 We compared the Council's performance against a group of similar councils known as the Audit Commission (AC) family group. These councils are grouped together because they share many characteristics such as population size, geographical area and demographics.
- 85 However, we share the Council's view that Guildford has a very large influx of shoppers and people using the bars and clubs in the town centre at weekends. This means that the Street Cleansing Service faces particular pressures that do not apply to the same extent to other councils in its family group.
- 86 The Council identified a group of councils with similar pressures to Guildford as the result of a large influx of shoppers and weekend visitors. When looking at the Council's performance on street cleaning, we compared Guildford firstly with the Audit Commission family group and secondly with its own comparator group.
- 87 When comparing the Council's performance on recycling, we compared Guildford with the AC family group only, as the influx of shoppers and weekend visitors does not have a significant impact on the recycling services.

The Street Cleansing Service

- 88 In 1999/2000 Guildford Borough Council spent £8.53 per head of population on street cleaning. This was among the highest in Guildford's family group of councils and among the highest spending 25 per cent of councils nationally.

Net spending per head of population on street cleaning ACPI J3 (1999/00) Audit Commission (AC) family group



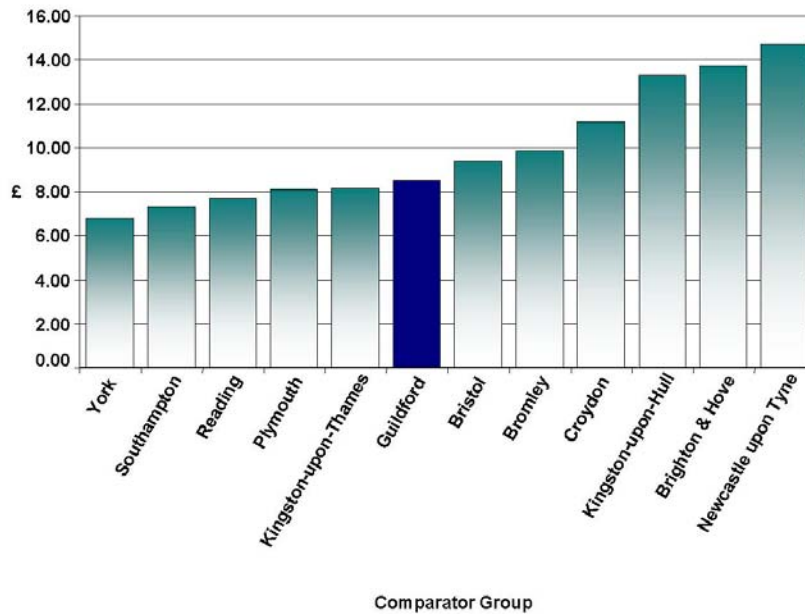
89 Historically, Guildford has been consistently in the highest spending 25 per cent of councils, as shown below.

Net spending per head of population on street cleaning – comparison of Guildford’s expenditure against the highest spending 25 per cent of councils ACPI J3 (1999/2000) Audit Commission (AC) family group

Year	The highest spending 25 per cent of district councils spent this amount or more than this amount:	Guildford spent:
1997/98	£6.41	£8.34
1998/99	£6.77	£8.62
1999/2000	£6.99	£8.53

90 However, when compared with the group of 11 similar popular shopping destinations (the comparator group), Guildford is mid-range for this indicator.

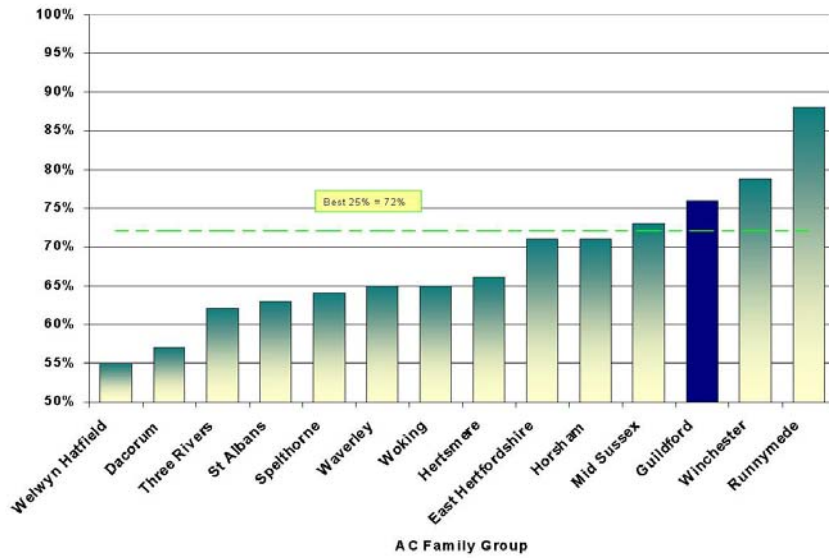
Net spending per head of population on street cleaning ACPI J3 (1999/2000) comparator group



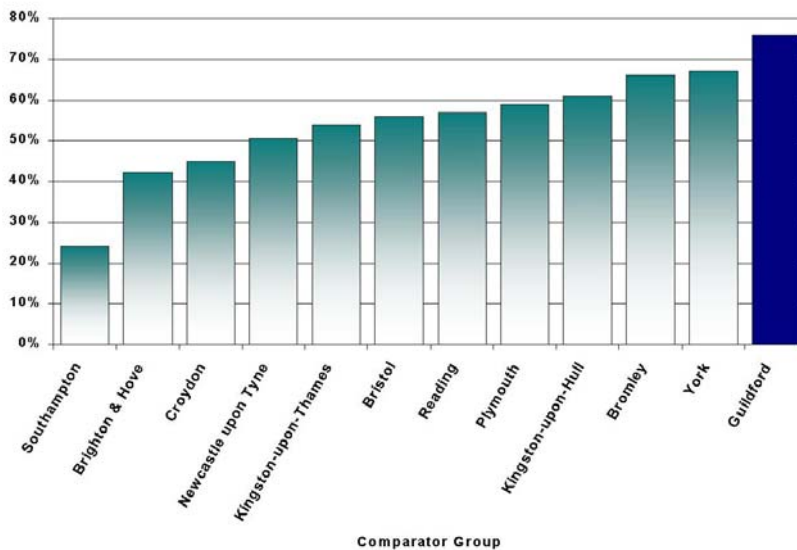
91 The performance indicator that measures net spending per head of population was discontinued as a national performance indicator and replaced by a new best value performance indicator from 2000/01. This measures the net cost of street cleaning and keeping relevant land clear of litter and refuse (BVPI 85). However, it is difficult to make comparisons using this new performance indicator this year because councils have different criteria for their calculations.

92 Although the cost of providing the street cleaning service is relatively high, the Council has one of the highest levels of satisfaction among residents. When compared with the comparator group, Guildford has the highest level of satisfaction. This is a very positive comparison.

Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards in their area BVPI 89 (2000/01) Commission (AC) family group

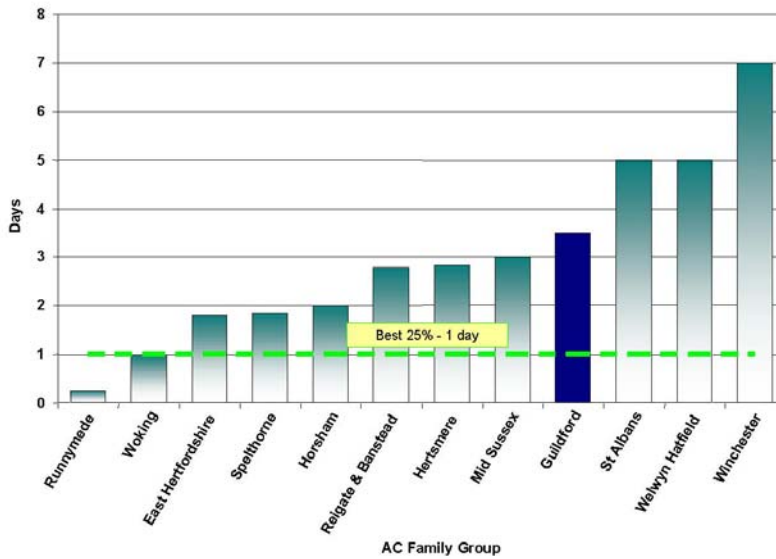


Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards in their area BVPI 89 (2000/01) comparator group

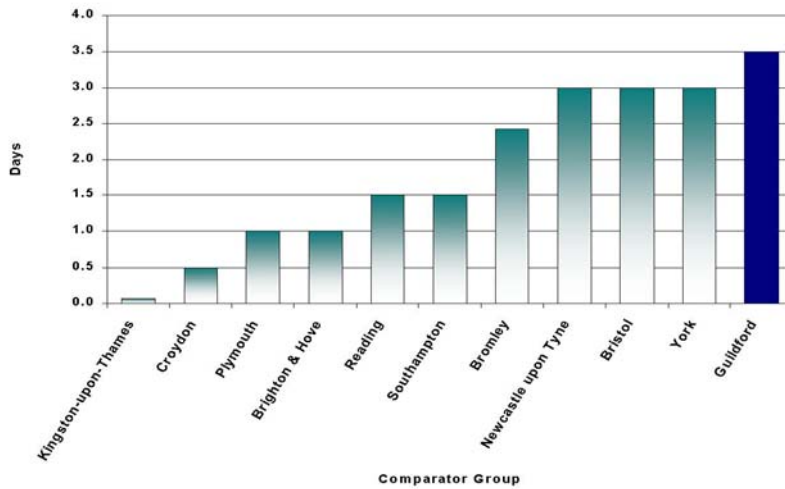


93 Guildford performs relatively poorly regarding the average time it takes (3.5 days in 2000/01) to remove fly-tips, both in the AC family group and its comparator group. The best 25 per cent of councils remove fly-tips in one day. Although Guildford removes smaller fly-tips relatively quickly, this figure takes into account the above-average time it takes to clear larger fly-tips. In its comparator group, Guildford is the worst performer, with the other councils ranging between 0.1 and 3 days.

Average time taken to remove fly-tips (calendar days) ACPI E2 2000/01: Audit Commission (AC) family group



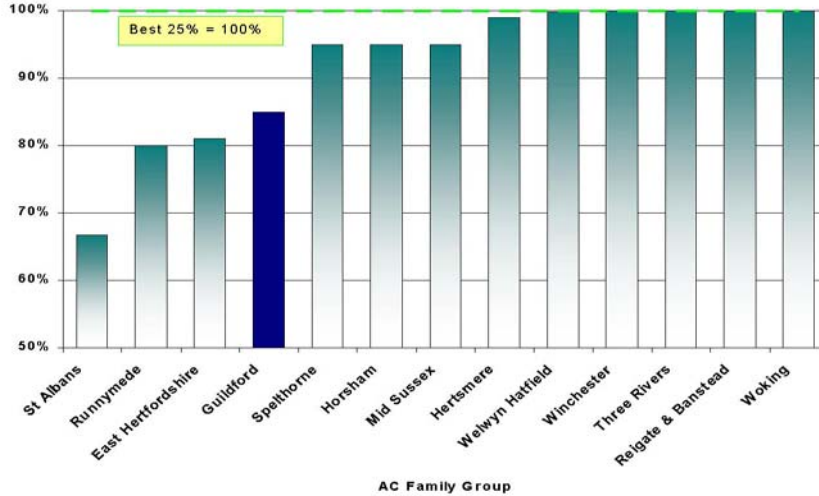
Average time taken to remove fly-tips (calendar days) ACPI E2 2000/01: estimated data only - comparator group



The Recycling Service

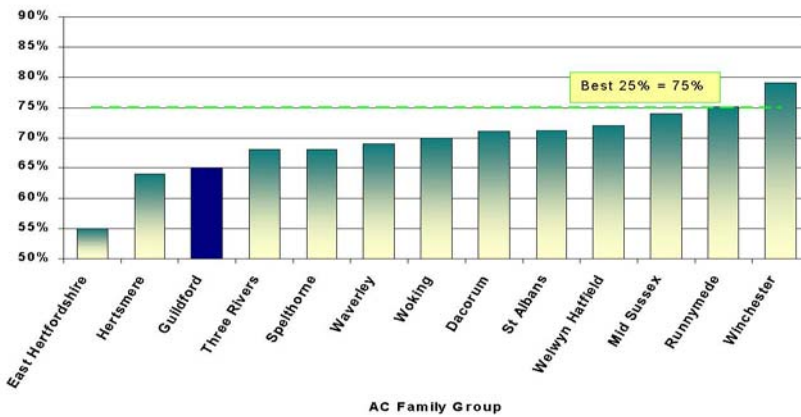
94 In 2000/01, 85 per cent of Guildford’s population was served by a kerbside collection of recyclables or was within one kilometre of a recycling centre. This figure is towards the lower end compared with its family group. However, Guildford is currently expanding its kerbside collection across the whole of the borough, and so this figure may increase for next year. In February 2002 the Council told us that it had reached 91 per cent.

Percentages of population served by a kerbside collection of recyclables or within 1 kilometre of a recycling centre BVPI 91 2000/01: Audit Commission (AC) family group



95 In 2000/01, 65 per cent of Guildford residents were very or fairly satisfied with their recycling facilities. This is lower than most councils in Guildford’s family group. However, this survey was undertaken prior to the more recent expansion of the kerbside collection service to households.

Percentage of residents very or fairly satisfied with recycling facilities BVPI 90b 2000/01: Audit Commission (AC) family group



- 96 In conclusion, the Street Cleansing Service compares favourably in terms of the level of customer satisfaction. However, it is relatively expensive compared with similar councils, and is among the most expensive nationally. The length of time taken to remove fly-tipped waste is relatively long. We discussed the reasons for this in earlier.
- 97 The Recycling Service compares less favourably in terms of customer satisfaction and access to facilities. However, this survey was undertaken prior to the more recent expansion of the kerbside collection service to households.

Summary

- 98 Overall we judge the Service as good for the following reasons.
- 99 The aims for the Service are clear. For the Recycling Service they are challenging and the Council's targets exceed the Government's targets for Guildford. The Street Cleansing Service has challenging targets that address day-to-day operational issues. However, they lack a longer-term outlook and do not emphasise the importance of proactive measures such as enforcement and education.
- 100 The Service is generally performing well in terms of the services that residents, customers and other stakeholders receive. Strong day-to-day performance management helps maintain an effective service.
- 101 The Street Cleansing Service compares favourably in terms of the level of customer satisfaction. However, it is relatively expensive compared with similar councils, and is among the most expensive nationally. The length of time taken to remove fly-tipped waste is relatively long. We discussed the reasons for this earlier.
- 102 The Recycling Service compares less favourably in terms of customer satisfaction and access to facilities. However, this survey was undertaken prior to the more recent expansion of the kerbside collection service to households.

How likely is the Service to improve?

Does the best value review drive improvements?

- 103 The best value review is the mechanism for ensuring authorities deliver continuous improvement in the services they provide.
- 104 The Council adopts a comprehensive and consistent approach to best value and views the process as part of the day-to-day job of councillors, officers and staff. This is supported by a strong corporate framework, which provides the following guidance and support for reviews:
- ◆ a detailed and easy-to-use best value toolkit called Service Review Guidance Notes;
 - ◆ mentoring and learning from previous reviews;
 - ◆ the establishment of the Best Value Working Group which monitors the progress of the review and provides ongoing support for the implementation of the improvement plan;
 - ◆ training for review team officers and councillors; and
 - ◆ the provision of a loan fund to pay for external consultants.
- 105 The Council carried out its review of the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service within this framework and the managers of the Service adopted a hands-on approach to the development of the process.
- 106 We also found clear councillor support for the best value process. Staff and councillors commented on the active involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders. There is also a continued role for the Best Value Working Group, which will provide ongoing monitoring of the improvement plan. This involvement of councillors is a positive feature of the review. It is the Audit Commission's view that councillors should be involved in driving improvements as they are the political leaders of the organisation and are directly elected by the public.
- 107 We found that staff had been involved throughout the review and had been invited to contribute their ideas through a questionnaire. At the outset, the Council set clear objectives for the review:

'to determine whether Guildford's Street Cleansing and Recycling services are economic, efficient and effective in meeting the needs of the Borough and in their contribution to the core values and strategic priorities of the Council'.

108 While it is encouraging that the Council set itself clear objectives for the review, we found that these objectives failed to focus on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service. Consequently, the review did not set out to question how the service could be better delivered in line with top performing councils. This meant that the degree of challenge brought to the review was limited. We shall discuss this further in the Challenge section below.

109 The scope of the review was also limited, with refuse not included. Although we understand the rationale for not including this service – the refuse contract is not due to expire until 2003 – we consider that the Council missed an opportunity to comprehensively evaluate the entire service in an integrated way before market testing.

Challenge

110 We found that the review included detailed challenge to the operational aspects of both street cleaning and recycling. The Council used the Recycling Working Group, Guildford's Management Services Unit and Kingsclere Associates – an independent management consultancy – to identify the operational issues facing the Service.

111 The issues they identified related to day-to-day aspects of the Service – most of which have an impact on the immediate concerns of the public. These included problems with increased fly-tipping, abandoned cars and the scheduling of street cleaning.

112 However, there was limited strategic challenge to the Service. Consequently, the review failed to fundamentally challenge the efficiency, effectiveness and value-for-money criteria of the Service. This is particularly important given the comparatively high cost of the Service. A more thorough challenge would have provided the Council with a better understanding of the areas that it needs to address in order to improve how it deploys and uses resources.

Consult

113 A strength of the Council's approach to consultation was the use of a number of different consultation methods. These included:

- ◆ a citizens' panel survey;
- ◆ a series of focus groups conducted by the Council's external consultants; and
- ◆ a detailed staff questionnaire.

114 We also found that the Council used the findings of the consultation exercise to guide the review and led to specific proposals in the improvement plans. These included:

- ◆ the introduction of new schedules for urban areas and the shopping parade; and
- ◆ a review of litter bins in the town centre.

115 However, there was limited formal consultation of other important stakeholders, such as the business community, schools, the university, voluntary sector groups, contractors and tenants groups. Given the significant increase in town centre activity, and Guildford's position as a main tourist attraction, the Council could have benefited from soliciting the views and opinions of these groups to determine how the Service could better meet their needs. The Council could have also explored how it could work in partnership with some of the stakeholders to deliver an improved service.

Compare

116 The Council visited a range of other councils to identify good practice in recycling and street cleaning. This led to some service improvements being identified in the improvement plan. These included:

- ◆ the rescheduling of the cleaning of town centres to concentrate on the town centre first thing in the morning and remove litter before shoppers and commuters are in the areas; and
- ◆ producing a standard set of answers to frequently asked questions for use by all staff and in particular the hotline staff.

117 The Council also collected a lot of comparative data and compared its own performance against national performance indicators with that of other councils. However, unlike the visits to other councils, it is not clear how this information was used to guide the review. The importance of benchmarking is not only to determine how the Service compares but, more importantly, to identify the councils that are performing better. The reasons for this can then be explored, lessons learnt and where suitable, examples of good practice applied.

Compete

118 The Council chose not to consider the competitiveness of the Service during the review. This was because the Council decided to consider competition more fundamentally together with the Refuse Collection service when the contract expires in 2003. The Council has made a clear commitment to reviewing the integrated Service as a package at that time.

119 However, it is our view that the Council could have used the review to develop a plan of action in advance of testing the competitiveness of the Service.

120 In addition, the Council could have used the review to test the competitiveness of the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service against its own established in-house criteria.

Summary

121 In conclusion, the Council approached the review positively, with good councillor and staff involvement and good use of consultation and learning. The review identified issues related to the operational delivery of the service and which have an impact on the immediate concerns of the public. However, the review failed to fundamentally address the question of how the Council could improve the Service. This is a result of the narrow scope of the review as well as the weak use of comparative data and the challenge element of the review. From

How good is the improvement plan?

122 A best value review must produce an improvement plan that sets out what needs to improve, why it needs to improve and how that improvement will be delivered. It must contain targets which are not only challenging but also designed to demonstrate and ensure the continuous improvement necessary to put the Service among the top 25 per cent of councils within five years.

123 The improvement plans for the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service address many operational improvements, including the purchase of new vehicles and equipment and the replacement of litter bins.

124 The improvement plans also include proposals designed to ensure that the Council reaches the new government recycling targets by 2002/03 and 2004/05. However, they do not set out what the Council will do to achieve or maintain best 25 per cent performance in this Service as measured against national best value performance indicators.

125 The improvement plans include a commitment to develop an approach to enforcement in order to deter littering by March 2002 and, since our inspection, the Council has prepared a draft enforcement strategy. This action goes some way towards addressing our concerns about the Council's approach to enforcement and education that we discussed earlier in this report.

126 However, the proposed improvements are not prioritised, measurable or costed, making it difficult to assess what are the most important areas of service weakness and need. In addition, many of the proposals are for further review activities, such as to 'continue to research best practice elsewhere', and to 'undertake household waste analysis'.

127 Many other proposals are internally focused management activities relating to, for example, communication with staff and performance appraisals.

- 128 This emphasis on review activities and internally focused activities is a weakness of the plan because these proposals do not deliver improvements to the Service that will benefit the residents, businesses and visitors to Guildford.
- 129 There is also a variable approach to target setting. Some proposals in the plan contain targets that are specific, measurable, and timed. For example, the recycling improvement plan sets an objective to achieve a recycling rate for household waste of 10 per cent by March 2001.
- 130 However, this approach is not consistently applied, with other proposals lacking such specific focus. This makes it harder for the Council to monitor and assess whether the improvement actions have been successful.
- 131 Critical to the development of the Service is the market testing exercise, which is due to take place in 2003. However, there is no clear plan about how to take forward the market testing exercise and the sequence of improvement actions identified in the improvement plan does not support this important exercise.
- 132 In conclusion, the improvement plan includes a number of operational service improvements that will address many of the needs identified by the review. However, it does not address how the Service will reach or maintain best 25 per cent levels of performance or show how it will achieve value for money. It also contains many internally focused or review activities and most of the proposals are not prioritised, measurable or costed.

Will the Council deliver the improvements?

- 133 Inspectors look for evidence that a council will deliver what it has set out in the improvement plan. We look for track records of managing change within the Council and, ideally, within the Service itself. The plan must also have sufficient support from councillors, management, staff, service users and other stakeholders, particularly those responsible for delivering it.
- 134 The Council has a strong track record of delivering high performing services, and this has been identified by previous best value inspections.
- 135 Within the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service the Council has a strong record of responsiveness, as it has developed a portfolio of services in direct response to the specific needs of local customers. Examples of this include changes to the scheduling of street cleaning, the introduction of the graffiti initiative and introducing kerbside collection of recyclables.
- 136 The organisational restructuring of the services that took place in 1998 has also demonstrated the Council's ability to deliver changes that lead to improvements for customers. This restructuring addressed issues of under-performance and resulted in the emergence of a more integrated, customer-focused Service.

137 Since the best value review the Council has implemented some of the improvement proposals listed in its improvement plan. These include the:

- ◆ introduction of facilities for the recycling of plastics at some of the recycling sites;
- ◆ introduction of a trial collection of green waste from households;
- ◆ extension of hours committed to street cleaning to continue in the evenings and at peak times;
- ◆ creation of a rapid response team; and
- ◆ investment in new equipment and vehicles.

138 Previous sections of this report have raised concerns over the weaknesses in the Council's best value review and in its improvement plans. These reduce the likelihood of the Service making significant improvements necessary to reach the performance of the best performing councils. However, in spite of these weaknesses the Council has a number of strengths, which will help it to deliver improvements to the Service. These are:

- ◆ good will, commitment and enthusiasm of managers and staff;
- ◆ a proactive approach to managing the recruitment of staff, such as regular advertisements and joint recruitment with other large employers;
- ◆ a corporate approach to managing staff sickness;
- ◆ opportunities for training and development of staff; and
- ◆ the general acceptance that the Council will continue to make available financial resources for the expansion of the Service.

139 We found evidence of political support for further improvements to the Service supported by the Best Value Working Group, which has an ongoing role in monitoring the implementation of the improvement plan. But it is unclear how the plan will be project managed. This absence of a project management approach could have a detrimental effect on the success and preparation required to market test the integrated service in 2003.

140 The most significant weakness, however, is the absence of a long-term strategy for the Service and its relationship with refuse collection.

- 141 The Council is aware of the unique and developing characteristics of Guildford as a town with an extensive nightlife, flourishing tourist attraction and bustling shopping precincts. In addition to this, street cleaning and recycling are also affected by demanding Government targets and performance indicators, as well as additional strategies and policies such as the municipal waste strategy and community safety.
- 142 All of these critical factors have a major impact on how the Service is delivered, and it is important that the Council is clear about how it intends to respond to these factors in a proactive, systematic way.
- 143 The advantage of doing this is that the Council would be in a better position to influence the above factors in its favour. This in turn could reduce the demands on the Service and result in financial savings.
- 144 We also believe that the Council would be better placed to improve the value for money and cost effectiveness of the Service if it were to adopt a long-term strategic approach to service development.
- 145 This approach should include the setting of clear priorities for the Service. This would result in a sharper focus on, for example:
- ◆ the reduction of the amount of waste produced by businesses;
 - ◆ an increase in awareness of the benefits of waste minimisation among householders; and
 - ◆ encouraging the active engagement of the local community in recycling.
- 146 In conclusion, the Council has a strong track record of delivering high performing services as well as a number of strengths. These include commitment and enthusiasm among managers and staff and a general acceptance that the Council will continue to make available financial resources for the expansion of the Street Cleansing and Recycling Service. However, the Council lacks a long-term strategy for the development of the Service, making it difficult to determine how it will respond to the longer-term challenges the Service will face locally and from national change agendas.

Summary

- 147 The Council approached the review positively, with good councillor and staff involvement and good use of consultation and learning. The review identified issues related to the operational delivery of the Service and which impact on the immediate concerns of the public. However, the review failed to fundamentally address the question of how the Service could be improved. This is a result of the narrow scope of the review, as well as the weak use of comparative data and the challenge element of the review.

- 148 The improvement plan includes a number of operational service improvements that will address many of the needs identified by the review. However, it does not address how the Service will reach or maintain best 25 per cent levels of performance or show how it will achieve value for money. It also contains many internally focused or review activities and most of the proposals are not prioritised, measurable or costed.
- 149 The Council has a strong track record of delivering high performing services as well as a number of strengths. These include commitment and enthusiasm among managers and staff and a general acceptance that the Council will continue to make available financial resources for the expansion of the Service. However, the Council lacks a long-term strategy for the development of the Service. This makes it difficult to determine how it will respond to the longer term challenges the Service will face locally and from national change agendas.

Appendices

What the inspectors did

The purpose of best value inspection is to make two judgements. The first is, how good is the Service being inspected? The second is, how likely is it to improve? We carried out a range of different activities to enable us to reach our judgements.

Documents reviewed

Before going on site, we reviewed a range of documents that had been provided in advance by the Council for us. This included the following:

- ◆ Best Value Review of Street Cleansing and Recycling Services. This included a large number of appendices such as;
 - ◆ Citizens Panel survey;
 - ◆ staff survey;
 - ◆ reports on visits to other councils;
 - ◆ consultation reports; and
 - ◆ Policy Panel reports and minutes;
- ◆ Best Value Performance Plan 2001; and
- ◆ Best Value Service Review Guidance Notes June 2000.

We also reviewed other documents and sources of information including:

- ◆ Best Value Inspection Report for Guildford Spectrum;
- ◆ Best Value Inspection Report for Guildford Revenues and Benefits;
- ◆ Financial Estimates Book; and
- ◆ Guildford Borough Council website.

Reality checks undertaken

When we went on site, we carried out a number of different checks building on the work described above in order to get a full picture of how good the Service is. We designed these on site ‘reality checks’ to gather evidence about what it is like to use the Service and see how well it works on the ground. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included:

- ◆ observing the cleanliness of the streets at different times throughout the borough;
- ◆ visiting recycling facilities throughout the borough;
- ◆ phoning the hotlines to request information and to report a fly-tip; and
- ◆ checking information centres for information on recycling.

List of those interviewed

We also met with or telephoned a range of different people involved with the Service as follows:

Robin Hales	Head of Corporate Strategy
David Searle	Head of Services Group
James Whiteman	Cleansing Manager
Cllr Keith Chesterton	Lead Member, Environment & Transport
Cllr Vivienne Johnson	Lead Member, Economic Development
Cllr Jenny Wicks	Member, Policy Panel, Env. & Transport
Chick Brodie	Recycling Officer
Eleanor Fielder	LA21 Environmental Assistant
Dave Tobutt	Transport Manager
Marie Treddenick	Community Safety Co-ordinator
Derek Trawber	Administration Manager

Bob Stranks	Surrey County Council, Head of Waste Management
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John Badcock	Senior Housing Officer
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Mike Paddock	Borough Treasurer
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Nicky Bristow	Manpower Agency representative
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Maurice Byham	Town Centre Manager
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Recycling and Street Cleansing Hotline staff	
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A sample of local businesses	
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We also held group discussions with:

Community Action Programme Representatives	
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Recycling crews	
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Street Cleansing Inspectors	
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Street Cleansing crews	
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