

Best Value Service Review – Year 2 Summary Street Cleansing

Where we were – 1999/2000

The street cleansing contract had been awarded to the Cleansing section of Guildford Borough Council and this contract commenced 01.01.94. A two year extension was subsequently awarded with the service continuing under this arrangement after this period whilst under Best Value Review.

Challenge

The service covers the following tasks:

- Sweeping of streets, roads and specified areas
- Litter picking in highway channels, carriageway and verges
- The scavenging and removal of litter, debris, detritus, loose chippings, animal carcasses, animal fouling, accident debris, oil & other deposits
- The emptying of all litter bins
- The emptying of all ‘Poop-Scoop’ dog waste bins
- The removal of leaf and blossom fall from paved areas.
- The emergency cleansing of roads following an accident including removal of debris, animal carcasses and the provision, spreading and subsequent removal of sand (in partnership with Highway Authority)
- The removal of fly-tipping
- The cleansing of street nameplates and Borough Boundary nameboards annually
- The cleaning of bus shelters annually
- Street washing in town centre (May – August)

The situation in 1999/2000 was that roads were inspected and cleaned as required. The result of this arrangement was that although the borough was kept to an acceptable level of cleanliness (92% of roads were shown to be either of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness in the period ‘99/00) not every road (non private) within the area was receiving regular attention. (The service was delivered throughout the borough by a team consisting of mobile litter

patrols, manual sweepers, mechanical sweepers and a management team. A 'Litter Hotline' was also available for the public to report street cleansing problems. The service operated 365 days a year but it was recognised that weekend cover and the ability to re-act quickly to litter problems were areas that required further attention.

BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Best Value process requires services to be reviewed under four main headings; Compare, Compete, Challenge and Consult.

To initiate the Challenge and Consult process, two reports were commissioned. The first report was produced by the Council's Management Services Section, and focussed on operations. With a view to gaining a totally independent viewpoint the second was commissioned from Kingsclere Associates, a small consultancy specialising in local Government services. This study included the organisation and facilitation of three focus groups involving members of local organisations across the borough.

Management Services Report

The main points raised were that improved supervision would improve efficiency, programmed work schedules would help standards and improve performance and further mechanisation would also enhance the standards of cleaning.

Kingsclere Report

- Within this report observations were made on the methods and results of the service. Kingsclere made many findings. Among these they found that there was a wide range of litter bins being used throughout the borough and it was felt that this situation required further investigation/action. They also found that weed growth was prolific in many areas and stated that litter from fast food outlets contributed to the problems within the town centre. Kingsclere

also felt that a great deal of work takes place throughout the year that the public is unaware of generally. They felt that the services should be advertised better.

- Focus groups – these were arranged to receive feedback on the public’s perception of the service and to discuss points of interest. The focus groups were formed by sending invitations to key contacts and these included representatives from community and interest groups e.g. parish councils, residents’ associations. Three meetings were arranged to cover the town area plus the east and the west of the Borough.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Focus Groups

The recommendations that came as a result of these focus groups were:

- Review cleansing routines for villages and urban areas – introduce schedules
- Arrange photo-calls and press releases for services like street washing
- Arrange a litter bin count and survey; review service provision
- Raise the issue of weed spraying and removal with Surrey County Council

Citizens Panel

In order to seek the views of the general public, questions regarding the street cleansing service were put to the Citizens Panel during the summer. The recruitment of members for the panel came from the Best Value Strategy and is made up of residents from 1,000 households in the borough.

This level of consultation was also required to meet this year’s Best Value Performance Indicators.

The final report from the Citizen’s Panel is yet to be published, however the summary results relating to street cleaning have been obtained and are as follows:

Very satisfied	17%
Fairly satisfied	59%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9%

Fairly dissatisfied	11%
Very dissatisfied	4%

Residents Survey conducted by MSS Marketing Research Ltd.

In this recent survey it was found that the level of dissatisfaction from residents in relation to street cleansing was 21% (this was the same figure as reported in the last residents' survey in 1997). It was also found that of those questioned 21% felt more should be spent on street cleansing.

In relation to compare and compete it can be reported that benchmarking processes are ongoing. It is being found that the cost of street cleansing in Guildford includes services like chewing gum removal and street sign washing that many authorities do not include. Officers are members of benchmarking groups which scrutinise various elements of service provision. Obviously, this process is on-going but it is becoming increasingly obvious that many Authorities deliver their services in many different ways and it is important to recognise and then adopt the best practices where applicable.

SERVICE CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE BEST VALUE REVIEW – WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR:

The following action has been taken since the start of the Best Value Review:

- Chewing gum removal – chewing gum was identified as a problem within the town centre. This service was introduced in April 1999 and operates throughout the year (weather permitting)
- Graffiti removal – this project recently received a Heritage Award for successfully removing and controlling this problem. Again, this operates throughout the year.
- Supervision – a recent re-structuring within Cleansing has resulted in improved supervision and inspections.

- Vehicles – new highway sweepers and a new precinct mechanical sweeper have been purchased. New vehicles for the litter patrols with improved capacity and tipping bodies have also been purchased. Two specialised vehicles have also been purchased which have hydraulic raising and lowering floors. These are to assist in transporting 3 new ‘walk behind’ sweepers which are also being used throughout the borough.
- Schedules – It has been seen from the consultation exercise that the public wants to know when their areas/roads will be cleaned. As a result new schedules have been drawn up for pilot areas within the borough. These are already proving to be very effective.
- Litter bins – New litter bins have been purchased and placed into the town centre. They have helped considerably towards the cleanliness of the town.

THE FUTURE

- Street Cleaning at weekends – The Council has authorised an extension to street cleansing hours on Saturdays and Sundays. This is due to commence in April 2001 and will help to further enhance this service.
- Incidents requiring urgent action - another area of concern was the speed at which crews can respond to incidents which require urgent attention and the subsequent disruption to scheduled work. Again, the Council has approved the formation of a ‘Rapid Response Team’ which will deal with re-actionary work. Again, this service is due to start in April 2001.
- Litter bins - one of the Kingsclere recommendations was to undertake a Borough wide review of litter bin provision. This work is due to be completed by the end of March 2001.
- Partnerships (fast foods/pubs/clubs) – a great deal of work has been carried out with many of the ‘fast food’ outlets who are very keen to assist in minimising the impact of the litter that comes as a result of their outlets. It is hoped that this work will carry on with continued success.

Further meetings are to be set up with the proprietors of a number of bars and clubs to seek their assistance with problems related to their activities.

- Community Action Programme -The Community Action Programme (CAP) is the Borough Council initiative which has established a network of volunteers across the Borough who monitor their neighbourhood and report any problems to the Services Group. This scheme has helped a great deal with street cleansing issues. Various publicity has recently been given to the programme and it is hoped to expand the programme through the recruitment of additional volunteers.
- Promotion and Education -It is considered important to raise the profile of the litter problem and encourage all sections of the community to join with the Council in reducing both the cost of the problem and its impact on the environment. Unfortunately, when public attention is drawn to this issue, it always tends to focus on the Local Authority and what it is doing to clean up, rather than the causes of the problem.

Officers are in discussion with the Tidy Britain Group with a view to becoming involved with some of their promotions and schemes, including the 'National Spring Clean' campaign in 2001. A publicity campaign is also being developed to focus on the following issues:

- Using litter bins
- Not dropping gum – take it home or use bins
- Taking your litter home if no bins available and recycling where possible. A lot of litter is recyclable.
- Using 'Poop-Scoop' dog bins and not allowing dogs to foul paths/parks
- Reporting fly tipping and what you should do if you see it happening. Also encouraging householders to ask contractors how they will be disposing of hedge cuttings etc.
- Information on how to report graffiti and what to do if it is seen happening
- Encouraging drivers not to empty ash trays out onto the road
- Providing numbers/information on pigeon mess.

- Weed control – although a County function, the Council has authorised a seasonal patrol to remove the weeds with a mechanical ‘ripper’ throughout the summer period. This service will start in 2001.

It is felt that the action that has been taken and the implementation of future plans will all contribute to an improved service to the community. The street cleansing quality control procedures under ISO 9002 are constantly under review and the success of the service is always under public scrutiny with the publication of national and local Performance Indicators.(PI's) It is also felt that the recent inclusion into the LEAMS programme(Local Environmental Audit and Monitoring Scheme) (Tidy Britain) will be an additional bonus. This scheme involves neighbouring authorities carrying out inspections in each others areas and recording the levels in each area. This should enable us to observe and implement best/revised practices where required with a view to improving the service.