

# **High Quality Environment Best Value Review**

## **Final Report and Improvement Plan**



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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The need for a review of the quality of the local environment was agreed by Cabinet in September 2001, with a small review team set up and asked to report back by December 2003. The final report has been delayed by a few months due to work pressure arising from CPA.
- 1.2 The review was asked to look across a wide range of Council services that contribute to the quality of the local environment. As the work of Planning Development Control had been included in an earlier review, this review focussed on the natural environment, street scene and associated issues.
- 1.3 As a first step, a quick review was undertaken of all individual services contributing to the quality of the local environment and, from this, areas that required more detailed attention were identified. These were then looked at in depth as outlined below.
- 1.4 **Public Perceptions:** The review team found that no information was available on residents' views about the state of the local environment. A survey through the Council's Citizens' Panel found that public views on the quality of the local environment were generally positive, with the natural environment being seen as contributing more to this than the built environment. However, there were concerns that the quality was deteriorating, with litter, mess, noise and new development being highlighted as issues, although other evidence suggests that overall the Council is dealing well with litter and mess. This research provides baseline information that has helped identify areas to be subject to more detailed review and against which the success of action identified in the improvement plan can be assessed.
- 1.5 **Natural Environment:** The team found that there was a lack of any cohesive policy or strategy setting out the Council's aspirations for the natural environment. As services that have an impact on the natural environment are in different sections and departments, it was considered that there was a need for such a policy/strategy to ensure that all Councillors and staff share the same, agreed aims. A key recommendation from the review is for such a strategy to be prepared.
  - 1.5.1 It also identified a lack of focus on 'countryside' issues, which was also raised in the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). To address this, the review recommends that a named Member and officer should be given clear responsibility for countryside issues. It also proposes that the City Council should set up a partnership forum with agencies dealing with countryside issues in this District and that current work on countryside issues should be more clearly identified and integrated across the work of the authority.
- 1.6 **Street Scene:** The team found evidence that the present division of responsibility for various elements of 'the street scene' between different departments and contracts meant that there was a lack of cohesion in the way the service was provided. Emphasis was being given to individual professional responsibilities rather than to outcomes for the customer.

- 1.7 Various options for providing a more cohesive service were reviewed and it is being recommended that clear responsibility for the street scene should be established at Member and officer level. It is also recommended that an officer group be set up to share good practice, review policies, share budgets and agree a consistent approach to contract management and delivery of services that have an impact on the street scene. Further recommendations are for trials to take place with an individual being given responsibility for managing the street scene in a designated area, with a view to extending this approach if it proves successful and for current service schedules to be reviewed to ensure they are properly integrated.
- 1.8 **Waste and Recycling:** The initial review recognised that the Council was in the top 25% of local authorities for the amount of domestic waste being recycled and had high levels of public satisfaction with the waste collection service. It identified concerns about the cost of the service, the need for a significant improvement to be made in levels of recycling if national targets are to be met and about the volumes of waste being collected. Following investigation, the review team was satisfied that the current cost of the service was a reflection of the emphasis given to recycling. A review of waste collection and recycling options took place through the Health Performance Improvement Committee, with options for improvement considered by Cabinet in January 2004. At that meeting it was agreed that amend the Council's policies for waste collection to encourage reduction in the volumes of waste produced and to carry out a trial of a new system of waste collection designed to meet the Council's statutory recycling target.
- 1.9 **Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA):** All local authorities are required under HECA to make a significant reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide from all domestic premises in their area. Subsequent Government guidance set a target for a 30% reduction between 1996 and 2011. The initial review drew attention to the fact that the percentage improvement calculated for domestic properties in this District was not on course to achieve this target, with the district being in the poorest performing quartile in the south east. Independent consultants looked at ways that the Council could improve its performance in this area and calculated that some £200,000 was required per annum to support this service, if the target was to be met. Given current budget pressures, the review suggests that no immediate change be made but that the situation be reviewed again in April 2005 in light of work due to take place on a climate change strategy for the District and any new Government guidance that might be issued in response to the Sustainable Energy Act 2003.
- 1.10 **Marketing and Education:** It became clear at an early stage that almost all sections covered by the review were involved in marketing and education – from raising awareness about the services offered by the Council through to seeking to change public attitudes in key areas such as recycling, energy conservation and generation of noise. While there were examples of good practice within sections, it was evident that activities were not co-ordinated between sections, with the Council potentially competing with itself for media and public attention. The team recommends that the proposed Environment Strategy include a co-ordinated communication plan, with external expertise drawn in to support this where possible.

- 1.11 **Light Touch Reviews:** A number of issues were identified in the course of the review, which were felt to be worthy of further investigation but where, for a variety of reasons, the extent of the investigation would be more limited.
- 1.12 In some cases these reviews provided an assurance that a service was providing good value, as with the Environmental Protection Team, or led to a positive improvement being made, as with revised procedures to ensure that those on benefits are not required to pay for a replacement wheelie bin.
- 1.13 In other areas, the light touch review identified a need for action, with key improvements identified being the need for a climate change strategy to be produced and for further, more detailed reviews to be undertaken of grounds maintenance and environmental improvement grants.

## 2. Starting Out

### 2.1 Scope of Review

2.1.1 In September 2001<sup>1</sup>, Cabinet agreed to carry out a broad thematic Best Value Review to look at all services that contribute to the quality of the local environment.

2.1.2 The Best Value Scrutiny Committee agreed the scope of the review at its meeting on 25 March 2002. The scoping report<sup>2</sup> set out the main aims of the review, which were to

- assess the quality of the built and natural environment within the District;
- look at residents and visitors aspirations for the quality of the natural and built environment;
- assess the present and future risks and potential changes to the natural and built environment;
- consider the current role of the Council in maintaining and enhancing the natural and built environment;
- produce options for reducing costs by 3%, 5% and 8% savings on existing budgets and consider comparative impacts of these;
- make recommendations for improvement.

2.1.3 The scoping report identified the following Council services to be covered by the review:

- Air quality
- Refuse collection
- Street cleaning / litter collection / Fly-tipping
- Recycling / composting
- Abandoned vehicles
- Climate change
- HECA (Home Energy Conservation Act)
- Flooding
- Pollution control
  - Contaminated land
  - Pest control
  - Noise pollution
  - Statutory nuisances
- Dog Control
- Light pollution
- Riverbank repairs / River management
- Biodiversity
- Involvement in designated areas, SSSI's, AONB's SACs, SPAs, SINC's, Nature Reserves, SAMs etc
- Landscape
- Conservation (of both built and natural environment)
- Tree protection and Arboricultural advice
- Tree management
- Grounds maintenance
- Parks and Gardens
- Environmental Improvement Projects
- Environmental Grants Aid
- Environmental Partnership Projects



2.1.4 Transportation issues were also specifically excluded as these were being covered by the Best Value Review of People and Work, being carried out at the same time as this review.

## 2.2 Review Team

2.2.1 A small team of staff and Councillors was established to carry out the review, with the following permanent members:

- Richard Botham (Business Manager Health and Housing) *Chair*
- Jacky Adams (Corporate Support Officer) *Best Value Adviser*
- Matthew Barton (Client Services Officer)
- Cllr John Beveridge
- Sue Blazdell (Environmental Health Manager)
- Cllr Therese Evans
- Vivienne Fifield (Principal Landscape Architect)
- Stephen Whetnall (City Secretary and Solicitor) *Corporate Management Team Link*

2.2.2 The team drew on support from throughout the City Council to carry out some aspects of the review. In particular it would like to thank Antonia Pickering (Assistant Corporate Support Officer), Teresa Kennard (Sustainability Officer), Nigel Trowell (Parks and Recreation Officer), David Boardman (Client Services Manager) and Andrew Nairn (Environmental Health Manager) for their support to the review.

## 2.3 Review Process

2.3.1 To comply with Best Value guidance, it was important for the review to

- **challenge** existing practices
- **consult** with all relevant stakeholders
- **compare** with good practice elsewhere and
- review use of **competition** in delivery of services.

2.3.2 As a first stage in the process and to provide **challenge** from the outset, the team held a seminar with all staff and Councillors involved in services that contribute to the local environment and asked for their views on

- ways in which their service could be improved and
- ways in which different services could work better together.

2.3.3 This work helped to inform the scoping report<sup>2</sup>.

2.3.4 The team then gathered information on each of the service areas being covered to identify the current scale of the service, the results of previous **consultation** and **comparison** exercises and the degree to which the service had been exposed to **competition**. Equality issues were also identified.

2.3.5 At an all day workshop held in May 2002, the team reviewed the results of the service summary sheets<sup>3</sup>. Areas where it was considered that greatest benefit could be derived from a fuller review were identified, together with a number of more service specific areas where more directed investigation was felt to be of benefit<sup>4</sup>:

2.3.6 During the course of the following year work was undertaken on these review areas, with the team holding a second workshop in April 2003<sup>5</sup> to review the outcome and agree any further action required. In some cases, the definition of the issue was refined during the course of the review, with some areas being found to require more attention, whilst others were adequately covered by a light touch approach.

2.3.7 During the course of the review, the following issues were identified as particular cross cutting concerns and were subject to in depth reviews, as set out in the following chapters of this report.

- Public Expectations
- Natural Environment
- Street Scene
- Marketing and education
- Waste minimisation, recycling rates and cost of the waste and recycling service
- Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA)

2.3.8 In addition, the following areas were identified for smaller scale review either because they were very service related issues or because the need for review was judged to be more limited – as indicated below. These reviews are written up in Chapters 10 - 22 of this report.

- Climate Change (impact of City Council's own operations believed to be being covered by a separate review);
- Abandoned vehicles (separate review of service being carried out through a Hampshire County Council audit)
- Environmental Protection Service (has been subject to independent assessment through Charter Mark and a peer benchmark audit was due to be carried out)
- Arrangements for out of hours cover (subject to a separate review led by Personnel Department and covering a wider range of services)
- Waste Collection – Clinical Waste Collection service (small, specialist service)
- Waste Collection – service offered to Gypsies and other travellers (service specific equality issue)
- Waste Collection – review of subsidies on cost of bins (service specific equality issue)
- Specialist areas – to consider whether there is scope for wider working with other local authorities on specialist areas of work (service specific issues)
- Air quality (at the time the review commenced the Council was in the process of assessing the need for an Air Quality Management Area in Winchester, with little scope for the review to add to work already in hand.)
- Trees and Hedgerows (although certain aspects fall within the in-depth reviews looking at the natural environment and at the street scene, there are some service specific issues that were also highlighted)
- Environmental Improvement Grants (service specific issue)
- Off site open space provision (service specific issue)
- Maintenance of on-site open space (service specific issue)

2.3.9 There were a number of other areas initially identified, where it was agreed not to undertake any additional work, for the reasons identified below.

- **Trade Waste:** The Council is not required to collect trade waste. While there are many issues regarding the volumes, disposal and recycling of trade waste, it was considered that these fell outside the remit of this review and would be better dealt with through multi-agency working.
- **Public Toilets:** Although not originally identified as a service to be covered by this review, the Team was aware that no other planned or completed reviews had specifically looked at public toilets. Service summary sheets were prepared<sup>3i</sup> and revealed that the service had been subject to relatively recent review, following which the Market Lane toilets had been renovated and plans put in place for further improvements to other facilities. Opening times had been considered on a number of occasions. In light of this, the Team considered that there would be little benefit from further work as part of this review.
- **The Built Environment:** The Planning Development Control service contributes to the quality of the local environment but was excluded from this review because it had already been covered by the Best Value Review of Development Facilitation that had reported in January 2001. In addition, conservation of historic buildings has been covered by a separate review looking at how the Council supports the heritage of the area, which is due to report in March 2004. In terms of 'the built environment', this review has focussed on the street scene, which is covered in an in-depth review (see Chapter 5).
- **Rivers and Flood Protection:** Initial service summary sheets were prepared<sup>3i</sup> and revealed that the main works required for rivers were covered in the contract with SERCo and that a thorough review of flooding had been conducted following major problems that occurred at the end of 2000<sup>6</sup>. The review team considered that they were unlikely to be able to add significantly to the work that had already been undertaken.

2.3.10 The Review Team recognises that further work could have been of benefit in a number of areas. With limited resources, in particular in respect of staff time, it has sought to prioritise its work, focussing on those aspects where it considered that there was greatest scope for improvement.

2.3.11 The following Chapters of this report look at each of the issues identified, the reviews that took place and the recommendations arising from these.

### 3. In depth review - public expectations

#### 3.1 Issue for Investigation

3.1.1 At an early stage in the process it became apparent that, while the authority had a lot of information on how residents perceived individual services covered by the review, there was very little evidence about public perceptions on the overall quality of the local environment. The aim of a cross cutting review is to look at the outcome of the totality of services from the perception of the public and it was therefore considered important that the review understand public views on their local environment.

#### 3.2 Investigations Undertaken

3.2.1 Research was undertaken through the Council's Citizens' Panel in July 2002<sup>7</sup> to **challenge** through **consultation** current views on service outcomes. The research looked at

- public views on the overall quality of the natural and built environment (Table 1)
- whether residents considered that the quality of the natural and built environment was improving or deteriorating (Table 1)
- the contribution made by different features to the quality of the environment (Table 3)
- the degree to which a variety of potential problems actually detracted from the quality of the local environment (Table 4) and
- residents' involvement in encouraging wildlife and biodiversity in their gardens.

3.2.2 In light of the number of people who indicated that they felt the natural environment was deteriorating (as shown in Table 1), a follow up question was included in the December 2002<sup>8</sup> Citizens' Panel survey to understand the reasons for this response (Table 2). As 'litter and mess' were identified as the most frequent concern, evidence about the levels of dog mess in the district were also sought, and are discussed below.

3.2.3 The results of these surveys were compared with information drawn from other recent consultation, including a question on quality of life issues asked of the Citizens' Panel in December 2002<sup>9</sup> and a visitor survey carried out between July and October 2000<sup>10</sup>. A full analysis of this information was considered by the Best Value Review Team in April 2003<sup>13</sup> and is summarised below.

3.2.4 Very limited **comparison** of these results was possible as it was the first time that key questions had been asked and the main survey was unique to this District. **Competition** was not relevant to this issue.

#### 3.3 Results of Investigations

##### Overall Quality of the Environment

3.3.1 Overall the results showed that:

- nearly three quarters of residents rate the quality of the natural environment as excellent or good;
- natural features, such as countryside, woodland and rivers are seen as contributing most positively to the quality of the local environment;
- views on the quality of the built environment were generally positive;

- views on the contribution that built features, such as street furniture, walls and buildings made to the quality of the local environment were more balanced, although more positive than negative;
- noise from roads and traffic was seen as the most persistent and major problem that detracted from the quality of the environment;
- about one in ten residents also see dog mess, overgrown verges and overgrown footpaths as major and persistent problems.

### **Changes in Environmental Quality**

3.3.2 The research raised worrying concerns about residents' perceptions that the quality of the environment was deteriorating, with key reasons being listed in Table 2. Further analysis of these results suggests that those who have lived longest in their present address are most likely to feel that the quality of the environment has deteriorated, suggesting that it is not a recent or short term phenomenon. Further research was carried out into the key concerns raised with results shown below:

3.3.3 **More Litter and Mess: Comparison** with other consultation and information suggests that in recent years the cleanliness of the environment has improved and is of a good standard compared to other areas in the country.

In particular:

- the Destination Benchmarking Survey<sup>10</sup> (July – October 2000) found that visitors generally viewed the cleanliness of streets as good – this will mainly relate to Winchester Town Centre, which receives the highest standard of street cleansing;
- a National Performance Indicator (BVPI 89) (October 2000) found that 79% of people were satisfied with the cleanliness of land in this District, placing it in the best performing 25% of local authorities nationally;
- a new National Performance Indicator (BVPI 199) found that only 12% of areas checked had significant or heavy deposits of litter and detritus. This figure has yet to be audited. 2003/04 is the first year in which this information has been collected, so no national comparison is yet available. However, the Government target is for no more than 30% of areas to have significant or heavy deposits of litter and detritus.
- work by the Council to persuade dog owners to clear up after their pets resulted in 20,729kg of dog waste being collected in 1998/99 (the first year the scheme operated) with this rising to 36,920kg in the first 10 months of 2003/04<sup>11</sup>. There is no evidence of growth in the number of dogs in the District, suggesting that there has been a real decrease in the amount of dog mess around in the environment.

Set against this

- A survey of housing tenants<sup>12</sup> carried out in March 2001 found concern with the amount of litter and dog mess on housing estates.

3.3.4 Other concerns raised were noted in background to lines of enquiry undertaken by the review, reported in following chapters. However, the review noted that countryside will continue to be lost to new development if both local and national targets for new housing are to be met, including those for more affordable housing. It was also aware that some of the concern about noise related to noise emanating from traffic, including aircraft. In these cases, the Council has very limited ability to do anything but seek to influence decisions taken by other bodies and recognises that any action (such as changing the surface material on the M3) is unlikely to be achieved quickly.

**Residents' Involvement**

- 3.3.5 The research indicated that about one in ten residents already considers themselves to be involved in caring for their local environment, with a similar number, particularly amongst younger age groups, showing interest in getting more involved if they knew how to do so.
- 3.3.6 Only 4% of those responding to the December 2002 Citizens' Panel indicated that they were taking no action within their own garden to avoid harm to wildlife and encourage wildlife, particularly birds. A further 3% of the Panel had no garden. Of the remainder, planting shrubs and flowers to attract birds and bees and feeding birds were the most common activities to support wildlife, with nearly three quarters of the panel undertaking each of these.

**3.4 Options Considered for driving Service Improvement**

- 3.4.1 This research into public perceptions was designed to provide challenge throughout the work of the review. Recommendations to address key findings are outlined in following sections of this report, in particular those looking at the natural environment (Chapter 4), the street scene (Chapter 5) and marketing and education (Chapter 8).

**3.5 Recommendations**

- 3.5.1 **Major Recommendation:** It is recommended that the questions shown in tables 1, 2 and 4 below, together with those monitoring community involvement and action taken by residents in their own gardens should be repeated in suitable surveys at about three yearly intervals. This will provide a regular monitor on public perception in this important area and help check that action taken in response to this review and through the general work of the Council is addressing the concerns raised.
- 3.5.2 **Minor Recommendation:** That the questions being asked are referred to the library of Local Performance Indicators to encourage other Councils to ask for views in their area which can help generate comparative information and identify those with good practice.

**Table 1 – Extract from Citizens’ Panel Survey July 2002**

<b>4</b>	Overall, how would you rate the <b>natural</b> environment in the area where you live?			
	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Poor</b>
	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>54.1%</b>	<b>24.1%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
				<b>Unacceptable</b>
				<b>0.2%</b>
<b>5</b>	Since you have been living at your present address, has the quality of the <b>natural</b> environment.....?			
	<b>Improved</b>	<b>Stayed the Same</b>		<b>Deteriorated</b>
	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>65.%</b>		<b>25.1%</b>
<b>6</b>	Overall, how would you rate the <b>built</b> environment in the area where you live?			
	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Poor</b>
	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>45.0%</b>	<b>42.8%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>
				<b>Unacceptable</b>
				<b>1.1%</b>
<b>7</b>	Since you have been living at your present address, has the quality of the <b>built</b> environment.....?			
	<b>Improved</b>	<b>Stayed the Same</b>		<b>Deteriorated</b>
	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>68.2%</b>		<b>18.7%</b>

**Table 2 – Extract from Citizens’ Panel Survey December 2002 showing responses in ranked order**

	<b>How long have you lived at your present address?</b>	<i>Average</i> 15.74 years	
<b>19</b>	<b>Do you feel that the natural environment in your neighbourhood has deteriorated since you moved to your current home?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
		55.6%	42.1%
		Please go to question 21	
<b>20</b>	<b>Why do you feel that the natural environment has deteriorated? (Please tick all that apply)</b>		
	<i>There is more litter and mess around</i>	<b>40.3%</b>	
	<i>There is more noise</i>	<b>35.2%</b>	
	<i>It has been lost to development (Homes, Roads etc.)</i>	<b>31.6%</b>	
	<i>There are fewer birds and wildlife to be seen in this area</i>	<b>25.5%</b>	
	<i>Local footpaths (NOT pavements) and bridleways are overgrown or obstructed</i>	<b>21.8%</b>	
	<i>There are more weeds, long grass or rough growth</i>	<b>20.9%</b>	
	<i>The air is more polluted (fumes etc)</i>	<b>17.3%</b>	
	<i>There has been a loss of trees and/or hedgerows</i>	<b>16.7%</b>	
	<i>Changes in agriculture</i>	<b>7.8%</b>	
	<i>Rivers and ponds are polluted</i>	<b>7.2%</b>	
	<i>It is being damaged by leisure activities</i>	<b>3.1%</b>	
	<i>It is being damaged by 'global warming' (Climate change)</i>	<b>2.9%</b>	

NOTE: Figures given are a percentage of those who responded 'Yes' to Question 18.

**Table 3 – Extract from Citizens’ Panel July 2002 showing responses ranked by those seen as most substantially improving the quality of the environment**

8	Thinking about where you live, how would you rate the contribution of the following features to the quality of your local environment?						
		Substantially improves	Improves	Neither Improves nor Detracts	Detracts	Severely Detracts	Not applicable
	<b>Countryside</b>	41.4%	32.8%	15.3%	1.8%	0.5%	8.2%
	<b>Woodland trees and hedges</b>	33.4%	43.5%	13.9%	3.6%	1.4%	4.2%
	<b>Rivers, canals, ponds and lakes</b>	27.7%	33.6%	13.6%	1.7%	0.5%	22.8%
	<b>Public parks, gardens and open space</b>	24.3%	47.1%	16.1%	1.6%	1.1%	9.8%
	<b>Roads and footpaths</b>	5.9%	28.2%	38.9%	18.2%	7.1%	1.7%
	<b>Buildings</b>	5.0%	22.9%	49.3%	17.9%	2.9%	2.0%
	<b>Street furniture (eg. litter bins, road signs, seats etc)</b>	3.2%	28.3%	43.5%	16.0%	3.5%	5.4%
	<b>Walls and fences</b>	3.1%	19.3%	56.1%	14.3%	2.3%	4.9%

**Table 4 – Extract from Citizens’ Panel July 2002 showing responses ranked by those seen as not a problem.**

11	Thinking about where you live, to what extent do the following detract from your enjoyment of the local environment?					
		Not a Problem	Infrequent Minor Problem	Persistent Minor Problem	Infrequent Major Problem	Persistent Major Problem
	<b>Empty or dilapidated buildings</b>	87.5%	7.4%	2.9%	1.4%	0.8%
	<b>Dust or drifting sprays from agricultural activities</b>	76.9%	18.9%	2.3%	1.4%	0.4%
	<b>Run down public spaces</b>	76.5%	15.6%	5.6%	0.9%	1.4%
	<b>Abandoned cars</b>	73.3%	19.6%	3.3%	2.8%	1.0%
	<b>Loss of hedges or trees</b>	72.5%	13.9%	4.9%	5.8%	2.9%
	<b>Run down gardens</b>	68.7%	22.2%	6.2%	1.0%	1.9%
	<b>Fly tipping</b>	65.3%	22.0%	8.2%	3.0%	1.5%
	<b>Nasty smells, (including fumes from vehicles)</b>	63.7%	24.5%	7.1%	2.2%	2.5%
	<b>Graffiti</b>	63.5%	27.0%	7.6%	0.9%	1.0%
	<b>Smoke from bonfires</b>	57.1%	32.9%	5.9%	2.1%	2.0%
	<b>Overgrown footpaths</b>	41.3%	27.6%	17.7%	3.6%	9.8%
	<b>Overgrown verges</b>	41.0%	27.0%	19.0%	3.4%	9.6%
	<b>Noise from roads or traffic</b>	41.0%	20.3%	17.3%	3.6%	17.7%
	<b>Vandalism</b>	32.0%	47.3%	13.4%	4.5%	2.7%
	<b>Litter</b>	28.4%	37.7%	24.5%	2.0%	7.5%
	<b>Dog mess</b>	26.6%	37.1%	21.7%	3.6%	11.1%



## 4. In depth review – the natural environment

### 4.1 Issue for Investigation

- 4.1.1 Winchester is a large, rural district with a range of special protection designations applying to various parts of the district. About half the district falls within the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and it also contains two national nature reserves, some 20 sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) and over 500 Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINCs). As shown in Table 3 above, natural features (countryside, woodland, trees and rivers) are rated most highly by local residents as features that improve the quality of their local environment.
- 4.1.2 At the time the review commenced, one of the Council's strategic aims was to help look after the built and natural environment. This has now changed in line with overall community priorities expressed in the December 2002 Citizens' Panel survey<sup>9</sup>, where improvement of the natural environment was not raised as a high priority for attention.
- 4.1.3 In its initial work to identify Council services that contribute towards the quality of the natural environment, the review team found that these were spread amongst sections and departments. It was concerned that there was a lack of clarity within the Council about who had ownership and oversight of issues affecting the natural environment, such as biodiversity. It felt that such issues were being seen as an 'add on' to other work rather than a core function of the authority. It therefore sought to find whether these arrangements were having an impact on the quality of the natural environment within the District.
- 4.1.4 These concerns have subsequently been reflected in the results of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, which drew attention to the lack of a countryside service and concerns that this may prevent the Council playing its full role in maintaining the quality of the local environment.

### 4.2 Investigations Undertaken

- 4.2.1 To **challenge** the Council's current approach to issues relating to the natural environment, the team;
- drew on the public **consultation** undertaken (see Chapter 3 above)
  - **consulted** with 11 key stakeholders using a semi-structured telephone interview – seeking views from representatives from a range of organisations with an interest in the countryside
  - **compared** the City Council's approach with two neighbouring authorities who appeared to take a stronger leadership role on countryside issues. In one case the authority owns areas of countryside, which it actively manages for the benefit of local people. The other District was similar to the City Council in terms of its size and rural nature. The comparison work involved semi-structured discussions with key officers in these authorities.
  - information obtained was then **compared** to the Council's current organisation and activities.
  - **Competition** issues were not directly addressed but, as can be seen, the Council currently uses a diversity of approaches including partnership with the voluntary sector and with other Councils.

4.2.2 A full analysis of this information was considered by the Best Value Review Team in April 2003<sup>14</sup> and is summarised below.

### 4.3 Results of Investigations

#### Stakeholder Consultation

4.3.1 The general feeling gained from the consultation was positive. Key findings are set out below. When considering these, it should be remembered that, unlike the Citizens' Panel surveys referred to in Chapter 3 above, results are not statistically reliable but simply seek to reflect the views expressed.

Overall stakeholders

- felt that the state of the natural environment within the Winchester District was generally good,
- were concerned that the quality of the local environment was deteriorating, with agricultural practices, traffic and noise being most frequently mentioned causes of this;
- valued the Council's contribution to work for the benefit of the natural environment, in particular
  - its partnership work with other organisations
  - its support to the work of other bodies through grants, allowing them to address areas that the Council is not fully addressing itself
- would like to see the Council more involved, in particular by
  - having a stronger focus on biodiversity issues within the District
  - taking more account of rural and countryside issues in its work
  - setting out clearer aims for the natural environment
  - developing a forum where countryside and environmental organisations active in the District can share information and ensure that they are working together towards the same aims.

4.3.2 Overall, the general message received from this consultation exercise was that the work the Council is currently doing is mostly helpful and well received. However it is clear from the responses that the Council is failing to provide any sense of 'leadership' in this area.

#### Comparison with other districts

4.3.3 Key findings were that

- the other Districts were seen as giving 'leadership' to countryside issues through having dedicated units and officers with this as their prime focus;
- the other Districts employed specialist officers to undertake work such as biodiversity reviews;
- the City Council makes greater use of grants and Service Level Agreements to voluntary sector/wildlife organisations to undertake such reviews and to work with community volunteers to achieve improvements to and management or creation of wildlife habitats;
- there did not appear to be an appreciable difference in outcomes in terms of the quality of local environment from the different approaches taken;
- one of the other Districts has been assessed as having very low need for improvement in terms of the management of the local environment through the CPA process. The other's CPA report has not yet been published but is believed to have been assessed more positively than the City Council.

**Review of City Council's structure and activities**

4.3.4 A review of how the City Council contributes to the natural environment identified that

- while 'helping to protect the natural environment' was a key strategic aim for the Council at the commencement of this review, the updated Corporate Strategy, which becomes effective from April 2004, does not give priority to countryside issues;
- while the Local Plan sets out policies to protect the countryside, the City Council has not documented how its own work will contribute towards these aims;
- without clearly articulated aims, sections within the Council engaged in work that has an impact on the natural environment are working independently and do not necessarily share common objectives or know what other sections are working to achieve;
- the Landscape Section in Development Services provides the Council's public face in relation to issues relating to the natural environment. This section was set up to support achievement of Local Plan policies through the Development Control process and time in the section is increasingly taken up by this, with broader work, such as addressing biodiversity issues and achieving environmental improvement projects, being undertaken as and when resources permit;
- the Landscape Section makes good use of grant monies to draw in support from specialist voluntary agencies, which helps to cement relationships with these organisations and sustain their operation. It part funds a joint post with East Hampshire District Council to look after the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It also provides grants for environmental improvement schemes undertaken by voluntary organisations which draw in match funding from a variety of sources;
- the City Council has responsibility under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act to manage an SSSI in its ownership (St Faith's Meadow). The lack of clear ownership of countryside issues led to a delay in addressing this responsibility until the Landscape Section, with the agreement of the Parks and Recreation Officer, commissioned a Management Plan from Hampshire Wildlife Trust;
- the City Council is part of the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership and has thereby accepted the need to prepare a Biodiversity Action Plan for the area. This work has been outstanding and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust has now been commissioned to prepare this Plan for the district, again with funding from the Grants Reserve;
- management of the natural environment on Council owned land sits with the Parks and Recreation Section in the Community Services Department. While good informal links have been established between this section and the Landscape Section there are no formal systems for sharing information and there is evidence that this does give rise to potential problems and lost opportunities. In particular, there can be duplication and confusion on issues to do with trees.

- both the Landscape Section and the Parks and Recreation Section have very full workloads with no spare capacity to undertake additional work on issues relating to the natural environment without additional resources or a reassessment of work priorities.

#### **4.4 Options Considered for driving Service Improvement**

##### **Option 1 – Stop providing the service**

- 4.4.1 There are certain elements of work relating to the natural environment, visual impact and design, where there would be a continuing need for support to the Development Control and Forward Planning services and to provide a service relating to existing Tree Preservation Orders. There is no statutory requirement to make new Tree Preservation Orders. A number of activities currently undertaken to enhance the natural environment are discretionary, such as giving environmental improvement grants, giving grants to voluntary organisations and becoming involved in broader countryside issues. As protection of the natural environment will no longer be a strategic priority for the Council from 1 April 2004, it could be argued that the Landscape Section should be reduced to its core functions. This would bring possible savings in the region of £130,000 from the Grants budget. If a professional tree officer were not provided there would be approximately £50,000 saving and if there were to be no in-house Landscape architects a further £55,000. The Open Space Officer's salary is met by developer contributions.
- 4.4.2 Set against this, under the Town and Country Planning Legislation the City Council has a duty to give protection to trees that contribute significantly to the character of an area. The City Council Local Plan policies address this issue and these should be upheld during the planning process by the imposition of planning conditions and Tree Preservation Orders. Without professional advice these would be compromised, as would the success rate of planning appeals and, potentially, public satisfaction.
- 4.4.3 The City Council would also need to be satisfied that it could meet its statutory responsibilities under the CROW Act, where the Landscape Section is currently providing a corporate awareness.
- 4.4.4 the Council's recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) identified the lack of a countryside service as a weakness. Without any staff or financial resources it would be very difficult for the Council to establish a credible leadership role in this area and tackle the weaknesses identified through the CPA process.
- 4.4.5 Members have already agreed that there will be no revenue for grants in the coming year, 2004/05, but they will be met from planning grant reserves, plus £50,000 from the Rural Areas capital budget, which will be wound up at the end of March 2005. Beyond which there is currently no commitment to extending this particular grant
- 4.4.6 Any other savings in this area, as suggested in paragraph 4.4.2 above, need to be offset against the need for specialist consultants. Grants also bring in funding for projects from other sources, such as landfill tax, which may otherwise not be available.

**Option 2 – Make No Change**

4.4.7 Under present arrangements, the Council has a role in the management of the countryside and all evidence suggests that the overall quality of the natural environment is good. The Council could choose to continue to provide services at their present level.

4.4.8 However, this does not address the weaknesses identified in this review and through the CPA process nor does it seek to enhance the Council's leadership role in this area.

**Option 3 – Enhance the service within the existing resource base**

4.4.9 It would be possible to redirect and refocus existing resources to help address some of the weaknesses identified in both the CPA process and through this review, while respecting the reduction in priority in this area within the Council's strategic priorities. Key improvements, which it is believed could be achieved are;

- preparation of a corporate **Environment Strategy** which will help focus all work within the Council towards common aims;
- establish a **partnership** for agencies involved in work on the natural environment, led by the City Council. This could feed in to the work of the Local Strategic Partnership, filling a gap in the present network of partnerships;
- establish clear corporate **responsibility** for the countryside and natural environment at both Member and officer level and ensure that this is promoted;
- **broaden** the work of the Landscape Section to more clearly embrace broader countryside issues, with the possibility of changing the name of the Section accordingly;
- better **integrate** Council work on countryside issues to ensure that all available capacity is being used to best effect.

4.4.10 The final two bullet points could only be fully achieved within existing resources if the priorities for both the Landscape and Parks & Recreation Sections and their working relationship were redefined. This could have an impact on the work that the Landscape Section does in support of the planning service.

4.4.11 If the approach proposed in paragraph 4.4.9 is adopted, the Council would need to be clear about the broader role of the Landscape Section and ensure that Members and officers taking responsibility for countryside issues had time to develop these roles and give meaningful leadership and support to any new partnership. Without this, the changes could be seen as only token in nature. Resources directed to these new aims would have to come from existing functions, which would have a negative impact on those who use or are familiar with the current set up.

**Option 4 – Create a new countryside unit**

4.4.12 The Council could establish a new countryside unit, with this taking work from both the existing Landscape Section and Parks and Recreation Section

where appropriate and also providing a wider countryside support service than exists at present. The time released in the existing sections could help address some of the work pressures in these areas. New resources would be needed to fund such a unit and there are no obvious sources of external funding that could support this.

4.4.13 At a time when the budget is under pressure, new investment in an area not identified as a corporate priority cannot be justified.

4.5 **Recommendations**

4.5.1 Produce an Environment Strategy setting out the Council's aims for the natural environment and ensuring that services across the authority are working towards common objectives and are co-ordinated.

4.5.2 Establish clear, corporate leadership for the countryside and the natural environment at both Member and officer level, with those designated being given time to carry out this role.

4.5.3 Establish a partnership for agencies involved in work on countryside issues, with links into the Local Strategic Partnership.

## 5. In depth review – the street scene

### 5.1 Issue for Investigation

5.1.1 There has been increasing emphasis in recent years on the role of councils in managing the “street scene”. In Winchester, a range of sections across several departments have responsibility for different services that together result in the ‘street scene’ experienced by local residents.

5.1.2 In the initial stage of the review it was recognised that

- there was no single officer or Member with overview of and responsibility for the ‘street scene’;
- a seminar of a wide range of Council staff revealed concerns about a lack of cross department co-operation, sharing of expertise, co-ordination of policies etc
- a survey of Housing Tenants<sup>12</sup> found real concerns on levels of litter and dog mess, particularly on city centre estates;
- the Citizens’ Panel survey in July 2002<sup>7</sup> found a general perception that the environment had deteriorated over time; and
- that survey also found that features such as street furniture were not seen as making a significant contribution to the quality of the local environment.

5.1.3 Notwithstanding this,

- public satisfaction with individual services is generally high;
- National Performance Indicators looking at cleanliness are positive and
- the costs of most elements of the service have been tested through competitive tendering and are provided by a private company (SERCo)

5.1.4 The review therefore focussed its attention on whether working arrangements within the Council and between the Council and SERCo could operate more effectively to address the issues outlined in paragraph 5.1.2 above.

### 5.2 Investigations Undertaken

5.2.1 To investigate the areas of concern raised,

- **consultation** was undertaken through interviews with
  - managers of key Council services
  - the SERCo General Manager for the City Council contract
  - Housing Tenant representatives
- the ease with which departments currently work together was **challenged** through process benchmarking, looking at the flow of work between a request for service being received and the work being successfully completed
- **consultation** with the public regarding the quality of the environment (see Chapter 3) was reviewed.
- the Council’s approach was **compared** to best practice emerging from work on the ‘liveability’ agenda as reported through specialist media.
- There was no specific consideration of **competition** issues as many of the key services have recently been subject to a competitive tendering exercise.

### 5.3 Results of Investigations

5.3.1 As demonstrated in paragraph 3.3.3 above, there is little evidence to support the perception that litter and mess have increased in recent years.

5.3.2 However, results of the process mapping exercise and interviews revealed a wide range of examples, which all served to illustrate the lack of co-ordination across services. These included:

- A Kings Worthy tenant (a member of TACT) requested improvement to local footpaths. A site visit involving Property Services, Housing management, Community Services and HCC Engineers was held, although no officers could agree on who should take action. A year later, similar staff and the same tenant noted no action to the same problem, despite universal agreement on the need for action. Again, no overall responsibility could be determined.
- Environmental Health is responsible for managing public toilets. They clean and repair the buildings, monitor their usage and upgrade or co-ordinate the building of new facilities (including surrounding land). However, when one site on which one local convenience sits needed attention, nobody across the Council could identify who should assume responsibility. Both members of the public and Councillors were passed around departments, all who claimed it was someone else's work.
- Staff in both Community Services and Housing had no appreciation of the Council's responsibilities for keeping land they control free of litter. Both operate to completely different standards than the Health Client team responsible for cleansing highway land.
- Dog Control, Housing, Engineers, Community Services, Car Parks etc all have staff responsible for site inspections. However, there is little evidence that these staff have an awareness of each others tasks so that resources can be shared.
- Procedures between Housing and Community Services to provide ad-hoc additional grounds maintenance works on Housing land are reliant on double inspections, two computer systems quotes between client agent and contractor, passing of quotes from client agent to client etc. An example followed through as part of this work revealed a process of 9 weeks to treat weeds in a garage area. After that time, dead weeds were left and eventually pulled up by Housing staff (a task which would have avoided the need for any work in the first place).
- Open space land throughout the district is adopted by the City Council and maintained in the summer months through the grounds contract. In the winter months it is subject to little inspection or general management.
- The grounds maintenance service is managed on an output measure of keeping grass below a certain length (and clearing litter on the same land prior to cutting). Street and footway cleansing is carried out on a mix of scheduled and responsive service. However, there is little or no co-ordination, with footway cleansing ignoring adjacent verges and verge clearance ignoring footways.
- Procurement of tree services does not take advantage of updates in financial limits contained in the current Constitution and is not organised in an efficient and effective manner.



- Budgets for grounds refurbishment, which includes tree and shrub refurbishment is very limited, as planning grants are often required to replace dead trees, which contribute to the street scene.

- 5.3.3 The research found that, whilst in general, the approach to customer care was strong, where issues either cut across services or where demarcations lines were unclear there was a tendency to “pass on” customers to another section, thereby protecting limited budgets. There is obvious scope for a more co-ordinated approach to customer care, with the officer receiving a service request taking responsibility for seeing it resolved, with any funding issues being resolved between teams after the event. The proposals for the new Customer Services Centre, when implemented, would prevent customers being passed between sections but could result in Customer Service staff meeting the same problem unless more consistent and co-ordinated policies and procedures are developed, including improved links between general fund and HRA funded work.
- 5.3.4 The interview with the General Manager at SERCo drew attention to the fact that little progress has been made with the development of a stronger partnership between SERCo and the City Council. The Depot contract, a 10-year service contract let to Serco in 2001, incorporates several of the services that contribute to street scene management. The contract was drafted with a view to developing an effective partnership with the successful contractor, with them working alongside the Council in the development of best value in service provision. However, this has not yet happened, with the recent procurement healthcheck<sup>15</sup> carried out by the IDeA identifying a very service operational approach to management of the Serco contract, a lack of strategic vision and little emphasis on partnership development. Also, the client/contractor relationship varies from one service to the next. Some services are managed through regular formal meetings, others through occasional informal discussions.
- 5.3.5 In discussing these issues, the Review Team also recognised the need for problems of litter, mess, graffiti, fly posting, fly tipping etc to be reported promptly so that it can be addressed. It felt that local Members could have a key role in keeping an eye on the local environment in their Ward and reporting any concerns promptly.

#### **5.4 Options Considered for driving Service Improvement**

##### **Option 1 – Stop providing the service**

- 5.4.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to keep land clear of litter and would be strongly criticised by the public if it were to stop undertaking essential maintenance tasks such as grass cutting. This is not seen as a feasible option.

##### **Option 2 – Make No Change**

- 5.4.2 Public satisfaction with services contributing to the street scene is generally high and performance against National Performance Indicators is good. While the Corporate Strategy makes reference to providing affordable homes in safe and pleasant environments, no improvements relating to the street scene are identified for the period 2004 – 2007. It could therefore be argued that there is no reason to make changes to services contributing to the street scene at this time.

5.4.3 However, this would ignore the weaknesses highlighted and result in a missed opportunity to achieve overall service improvements.

**Option 3 – Enhance the service within the existing resource base**

5.4.4 There are a number of options that could be considered to provide better co-ordination of services within the existing resource base, as indicated below:

5.4.5 **Better Integration of Services** – As a minimum, a review of service schedules for the cleansing and grounds services needs to be completed to identify the potential for improving the co-ordination of two very high profile estate based services. This review should also take into account options for the ad-hoc cleansing and grounds work procured by Housing staff.

5.4.6 **A Street Scene or Land Management Team** – It could be argued that the only way to ensure that different services are better co-ordinated is to bring them under the same management. This could be limited to Depot services (Cleansing and Grounds for example) or a more broad approach including all environmental services such as Engineering, Car Parks, Landscaping, Cleansing, Grounds and Dog Control.

5.4.7 **Developing the Environmental Strategy** – The Environmental Strategy recommended in Chapter 4 above could also consider the development of clear policies and actions for the management of the Street Scene. However, the key to its effectiveness will be “ownership” through an agreed corporate lead officer.

5.4.8 **The Authorised Officer Role** – The current role could be developed to take a more strategic responsibility for Environment Services. This would require little or no restructuring but could help to provide a focus for the development of clear corporate standards and policies.

5.4.9 **Establish a Corporate Group** – All key managers, including representatives from Hampshire County Council and SERCo, could be tasked with working on a group with the aim of sharing good practice, reviewing policies together, sharing budgets and agreeing a consistent approach to contract management and service provision. This will be required anyway to achieve option 5.4.5 above.

5.4.10 **The SERCo Partnership** – With £5 million per annum spent on this contract, the move towards developing a partnership approach rather than a traditional contract was seen as important to ensure value for money. However, three years on, little has changed. If a serious partnership is to be developed, some strategic changes will be needed. These could range from re-engineering the client/contractor role, with SERCo assuming responsibility for certain traditional client functions (identifying hit squad work for example), through to SERCo representation at Corporate Management Team (although there are reservations about this last option).

5.4.11 **Enhanced Role for Ward Members** - Ensure that all Councillors are properly encouraged to keep an eye on the quality of the local environment in their Ward, report any problems promptly and monitor that appropriate action is taken within agreed service standards.

**Option 4 – Invest in further service development**

- 5.4.12 Additional investment would allow further development of the service.
- 5.4.13 This option is not recommended. The review has confirmed that generally both public perceptions and actual measurements show that the street scene is good. The main problems identified are ones of co-ordination between services rather than overall lack of resources. Adopting recommendations made under Option 3 above should allow more effective use to be made of resources available.

**5.5 Recommendations**

- 5.5.1 Establish clear, corporate leadership for the street scene at both Member and officer level, with those designated being given time to carry out this role.
- 5.5.2 Clarify the Council's aims for the 'street scene' as part of the Environment Strategy.
- 5.5.3 Carry out a review of cleansing and maintenance schedules covered by the SERCo contract, with a view to ensuring that these are updated and fully integrated.
- 5.5.4 Establish an officer group, including representatives from Hampshire County Council and SERCo, under the leadership of the officer with corporate ownership of the street scene, with the aim of sharing good practice, reviewing policies together, sharing budgets and agreeing a consistent approach to contract management and service provision.
- 5.5.5 Carry out trials in Winchester Town Centre and on the Highcliffe housing estate, whereby an individual is given responsibility for identifying and resolving street scene issues, with feedback on problems faced being used to drive better service integration.
- 5.5.6 Review the potential for rolling out these trials to other areas in due course, including the role for Ward Members.

## 6. In depth review – waste management and recycling

### 6.1 Issue for Investigation

6.1.1 The initial review of these services found that the service was reliable and well respected by the public, with missed bins, public satisfaction and percentage of waste recycled all being in the best performing 25% of local authorities. The service is provided through a contract with SERCo, following a process of competitive tendering.

6.1.2 However, the Team identified three key aspects of the service where it considered that an in-depth review should be undertaken, namely:

- costs of the Council's waste collection and recycling services were within the most expensive 25% of authorities in the country;
- the Council was not on track to meet its statutory target to increase recycling levels to 30% in 2003/04 and 36% in 2005/06 – with information prepared in background to the CPA inspection placing the Council in the worst performance 25% of authorities nationally in terms of progress towards this target;
- the amount of waste being collected was high, placing the Council in the poorest performing 25% of local authorities in the country in terms of waste minimisation.

### 6.2 Investigations Undertaken

6.2.1 To investigate the areas of concern:

- costs of the Council's waste collection and recycling service were **compared** with the costs of other authorities that were achieving similar rates of recycling;
- a Member seminar was held in March 2003 to **challenge** current practices and learn from **comparison** with neighbouring authorities achieving higher recycling rates;
- the Council's Health Performance Improvement Committee set up an informal Member/officer group, which carried out an in-depth review of the Council's waste collection and recycling service drawing on
  - **consultation** previously undertaken with residents;
  - **comparison** with systems adopted in neighbouring councils to raise recycling rates;
  - **comparison** with collection policies used in other authorities to help minimise waste going to landfill;
  - information on contents of waste collected to **challenge** the scope for raising recycling rates locally;
  - **challenging** the scope for local waste disposal facilities to cope with enhanced collection of recyclable materials.
- the service was recently subject to competitive tender, with the current contract allowing for response to Best Value reviews. No specific further consideration of **compete** issues was therefore considered necessary.

### 6.3 Results of Investigations

6.3.1 Table 5 below sets out a comparison of the costs of the Council's waste collection and recycling service with costs incurred by other comparable authorities that are achieving equivalent recycling rates. As will be seen from this, the Council's costs were about average for this group. The Review Team therefore concluded that the costs were a reflection of the level of

recycling being achieved rather than evidence of an unduly costly system. No further action was taken on this point, particularly as a full analysis of the costs of future systems was included in the options appraisal arising from the work of the Health Performance Improvement Committee review.

**6.3.2 Tables 5a – Comparison of refuse collection and recycling costs with other Hampshire Authorities**

<b>Hampshire Local Authorities</b>	<b>Cost in £ per Household</b>
Test Valley Borough Council	74
East Hampshire District Council	71
Hart District Council	60
Basingstoke & Deane District Council	57
Gosport Borough Council	57
New Forest District Council	56
<b>Winchester City Council</b>	<b>55</b>
Fareham Borough Council	50
Havant Borough Council	48
Rushmore Borough Council	37
Eastleigh Borough Council	36

**6.3.3 Table 5b – Comparison of refuse collection and recycling costs with CIPFA Family Group**

<b>CIPFA Family Group</b>	<b>Cost in £ per Household</b>
Test Valley Borough Council	74
East Hampshire District Council	71
Salisbury District Council	61
Tonbridge & Malling District Council	58
Mid Sussex District Council	56
<b>Winchester City Council</b>	<b>55</b>
Maidstone District Council	48
South Oxfordshire District Council	45

6.3.4 The results of the full investigation undertaken by the informal Member/officer Group were reported to the Council's Health Performance Improvement Committee on 21 January 2004 and Cabinet on 28 January 2004 (reports HE21<sup>16</sup> and CAB755<sup>17</sup> refer). In summary, the informal Member/officer group found that

- the Council's current policies, permitting garden waste to be disposed of in wheelie bins, were leading to higher waste volumes than in districts where such waste would not be collected;
- notwithstanding the good recycling figures already being achieved, many recyclable materials were still being thrown out with general waste;
- other authorities had successfully increased their recycling rates and reduced amounts of residual waste by collecting recyclable materials one week and other waste the next week;
- additional facilities were now available to cope with increased collection of recyclable materials and to compost green waste, if collected separately.

**6.4 Options considered for driving service improvement**

6.4.1 A summary of the options considered by the information Member/officer Group is set out in Table 6 below. As will be seen, the options considered include no change to the existing service, changes that could result in cost savings and changes requiring new investment.

6.4.2 The Council has a statutory duty to collect domestic refuse and has been set statutory targets to increase levels of recycling. Safe collection and disposal of waste is important to protect the health of the community. For these reasons, the Council does not have an option to stop delivering the service.

**6.5 Recommendations**

6.5.1 Following consideration of report CAB755<sup>17</sup>, Cabinet agreed to

- revise its waste collection policies to encourage householder to reduce volumes of general waste produced;
- to carry out a pilot on the lines of option 12 as set out in Table 6 below early in 2005/06.

6.5.2 The actions arising from these decisions have been included in the Improvement Plan for this report for sake of completeness.

**Table 6 - Summary of Options for Increasing the Recycling / Composting Rate**

Option	Estimated Recycling / Composting Rate	Estimated Additional Revenue Cost (pa)	Comments / Other Implications
1. Present arrangements (weekly refuse + fortnightly recycling collections + network of 'bring' sites)	18% (Actual)	N/A	N/A
2. Continue present arrangements but allow householders to swap their refuse and recycling bins	19-20%	N/A	Some increase in excess refuse and the contamination of recyclables with refuse
3. Continue present arrangements but offer larger bins or sacks for recycling (either free or subsidised)	21-22%	Up to £60K depending on 'take up' of larger bins or sacks	Capital cost of bin replacement + cost of dealing with large number of replaced bins. Revenue cost of sack provision
4. Continue present arrangements + introduce chargeable fortnightly garden waste collection service with ban on garden waste in wheeled bins	20-21%	Dependent on level of charge	Negligible participation + garden waste ban difficult to enforce
5. Continue present arrangements + establish more 'bring' sites for glass and textiles	21-22%	Up to £10K	Negligible impact + difficulty of finding suitable locations for new sites
6. Continue present arrangements + introduce free fortnightly garden waste collection service	25-26%	£250-350K	+ Cost of bags for garden waste & distribution
7. Present arrangements with compulsory bin swap & free fortnightly garden waste collection service	29-31%	£310-410K	As 6. + some contamination of recyclables with refuse + potential difficulties over ownership of present refuse bins
8. Increase frequency of recycling collections to weekly	23-24%	£250-350K	Spare capacity in refuse bins taken up with additional garden and other waste
9. Increase frequency of recycling collections to weekly & reduce refuse collection to fortnightly	27-28%	Up to £60K	Significant contamination of recyclables with refuse + some bin replacement
10. Alternate weekly collections of refuse and recyclables (AWC)	28-29%	Saving of £190-350K	£400-500K capital cost of bin replacement + cost of managing large number of replaced bins
11. AWC + chargeable fortnightly garden waste collection service, aimed at the Council achieving its statutory target	31-32%	AWC saving offset by cost of garden waste	As 10. above + negligible participation in garden waste service
12. AWC + free fortnightly garden waste collection service	Up to 35%	£160-250K	+ estimated £250K for garden waste bags, additional bins & distribution
13. As Option 12 + fortnightly kerbside collection of glass	37-38%	Up to £700K	As 12. + additional £125K for boxes or baskets for glass and distribution

## 7. In depth review – Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA)

### 7.1 Issue for Investigation

7.1.1 All local authorities are required under the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) to make a significant improvements in energy efficiency in domestic premises in their area built at the time the Act came into force. Subsequent Government guidance set a target for a 30% improvement between 1996 and 2011. The Council is required to report annually to DEFRA on its progress against this target as part of its Housing Strategy and to prepare an annual action plan to demonstrate the steps being taken to achieve it.

7.1.2 The Council has achieved an average annual energy savings rate of about 1.3% per year in the seven years to 2002/03, although progress has been better over the last two of these years, where annual improvements of 2.68% and 2.93% have been achieved. Activities include partnership working through a programme of presentations to schools, businesses, parish councils, voluntary organisations and agencies, campaigns/leaflet distributions, exhibitions and road shows, etc. Direct savings are achieved through grant aided home improvements for effective energy saving measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation.

7.1.3 However, it is recognised that at the present level of resource input, the Council is not on course to achieve the 30% target by 2011, with the district being in the lowest performing quartile in the south east. The annual HECA report<sup>18</sup> shows that since 1996 a total of 9.28% energy efficiency saving has been achieved up to 31 March 2003. During this period, home improvement grant aid for energy saving measures amounted to around £575,000 targeted to some 1,400 dwellings/households in need of assistance..

### 7.2 Investigations Undertaken

7.2.1 As a result of the above position highlighted through this review, an independent assessment of how the Council can achieve its HECA targets was undertaken by ESD Energy Consultants. This work had the support of SHECANE (Southern HECA Network) and attracted funding from the Energy Savings Trust as it was intended that the findings would act as a model for other authorities facing similar difficulties.

7.2.2 In their investigation, the consultants, ESD

- **challenged** the Council's approach to meet the HECA requirements;
- **compared** this approach against best practice elsewhere.

7.2.3 The nature of the review meant that neither **consult** nor **compete** issues were directly addressed, although the consultants drew on their wider knowledge of the field when compiling their report.

7.2.4 Prior to the review, the Council had completed a house condition and energy survey for the private sector housing stock. A similar survey for the Council owned stock also took place during the course of the review, with the results of this due to be published shortly. Energy efficiency measures were reviewed as part of both of these surveys.



### 7.3 Results of Investigations

#### 7.3.1 In their final report<sup>19</sup>, the consultants

- questioned the accuracy of the 1996 baseline reading used by this and other Councils and drew attention to the lack of a national, standardised data gathering system. The City Council uses methodology and reporting developed by the Building Research Establishment and has only included information on activities known to have taken place. This is likely to give a more cautious estimate of the situation than some other reporting systems;
- identified that some Councils had obtained better data by sending out a questionnaire looking at energy efficiency measures with electoral registration forms. In response to this, the City Council carried out such a survey in the autumn of 2003. A purpose designed questionnaire was delivered to 44,500 dwellings. There was a 55% response rate and the results are currently being analysed;
- confirmed that the key target audiences were owner occupiers, who will be willing to invest their own money in energy efficiency measures, and the Council's own housing stock, where there is scope for the authority to set an example to others.
- proposed that the Council should focus its attention on promoting loft insulation and cavity wall insulation as these were found to be the most effective measure that would have the greatest impact on energy saving levels;
- drew attention to other funding streams available to support individuals who wished to improve their homes, in particular the requirement for fuel suppliers to make funds available to promote energy efficiency. The consultants estimated that the equivalent of £948,000 should be available in this district from that source, although it is the responsibility of the fuel suppliers to decide how they target and spend this.
- identified the need for additional marketing activity to promote greater home energy efficiency if the 30% improvement target is to be achieved and gave proposals for key elements of such a marketing campaign.
- calculated that the Council would need to find a further £200,000 per annum on the following, if HECA targets were to be met annum:

2 full time HECA Officers:	£80,000
Marketing budget	£50,000
'Helpline' costs:	£40,000
Outsourcing/partnerships	£30,000

7.3.2 The full consultants report<sup>19</sup> was received in May 2003 and was reported to the Informal Member / Officer Stock Condition Group on 24 June 2003. The Group agreed to seek to gather better data by sending out survey forms with the 2003 electoral registration survey (see second bullet point above) and to wait for those results before making any recommendations to Cabinet.

- 7.3.3 Research into the Act and the consultant's review also confirmed that
- the Act only applies to domestic properties that were built before it came into force; and
  - it only looks at increases in energy efficiency, not at other approaches that can reduce emission of carbon dioxide from home heating, such as renewable energy sources, for example solar panels;
- 7.3.4 The private sector stock condition survey found an average SAP rating (an assessment of energy efficiency of a property where the higher the SAP rating the greater the energy efficiency) of 51.2 compared to the national average of 44.
- 7.3.5 The Council house stock condition survey found an average SAP rating of 65, again well above the national average. When considering these figures, it needs to be remembered that HECA looks at the percentage improvement achieved, not the actual level of energy efficiency.

#### 7.4 Options considered for driving service improvement

##### **Option 1 – Stop providing the service**

- 7.4.1 Although the Council has a duty to comply with the Home Energy Conservation Act, it could take the view that promotion of energy efficiency nationally and through other agencies is adequate to achieve this. This would give a potential saving of some £15,000 and a small amount of staff time, although this is of a level that the time saved is more likely to be diverted to other work than translated into a salary saving.
- 7.4.2 One of the Council's strategic priorities is 'to minimise pollution and waste and to make efficient use of resources'. Although energy efficiency in domestic properties is not particularly identified as an area for improvement in the next three years (2004 – 2007), a reduction in service in this area would not be compatible with this priority. It would also not reflect well on the Council to be seen to ignoring its duty under the Home Energy Conservation Act, particularly as much of the work is linked to reducing fuel poverty. In addition, achievement of HECA aims forms a key part of the Council's Housing Strategy that is assessed by the Government Office and on which Basic Credit Approvals are based.

##### **Option 2 – Make No Change**

- 7.4.3 At its current rate of progress, the Council would be in line to achieve an improvement of 20% in energy efficiency within the district by 2010. In addition, the Council house stock condition survey indicated a need for additional loft insulation work to be carried out to bring properties up to the Decent Homes Standard and this will have a positive impact on the rate of improvement. Notwithstanding this, the Council is still likely to fall short of the target set by Government. The Council could accept that, given the good levels of energy efficiency already achieved within the District, this level of change is acceptable to it and satisfies the legal requirement to make 'a significant improvement'.
- 7.4.4 However, this still falls short of the target set in the Government guidance and it could reflect badly on the Council if it is seen to be challenging Government guidance, particularly in an area which has been identified as a priority for the authority. In addition, under the Sustainable Energy Act 2003, the Government has the power to set binding HECA targets on local authorities.

It is currently considering its use of these powers and the Council could find itself disadvantaged if a statutory target is set.

**Option 3 – Enhance the service within the existing resource base**

- 7.4.5 At present, about 10% of an officer's time is devoted to HECA work in the Private Sector Housing Team. It will be difficult to achieve substantial improvement without diverting other resources from other areas in the Council to support the work on HECA. At this point in time, it has not been possible to identify resources that can support this work. However, the priority to be given to this work may need to be reviewed once the Government has indicated what action it will be taking on the Sustainability Energy Act and as the Council's own work on responding to climate change is developed during the coming year. It is therefore proposed that the situation be reviewed in about a year's time in light of these issues.

**Option 4 – Invest in further service development**

- 7.4.6 The consultant's report estimated that a further £200,000 per annum would be needed if the Council was to achieve the 30% improvement in energy efficiency by 2011 that is required to meet the present Government target.
- 7.4.7 While this work is in line with the Council's strategic priority to minimise pollution and waste and make efficient use of resources, it has not been identified as an improvement area and, given current budget pressures, is not recommended.

**7.5 Recommendations**

- 7.5.1 That the Council continues to pursue its current approach to HECA but that the situation be reviewed in April 2005. The risk of this approach is that greater investment (either through new or redirected resources) will subsequently be needed if the required improvement is to be achieved, as less time will remain for action to be taken.

## 8. In depth review – Marketing and Education

### 8.1 Issue for Investigation

8.1.1 At an early stage it was recognised that most sections covered by this review were involved in publicising and communicating the services they offered. In addition, many were seeking to influence public behaviour in order to achieve targets and support the Council's goals. For example,

- recycling rates can only successfully be raised if people are persuaded to participate by sorting their rubbish and
- noise nuisance can best be tackled by encouraging people not to create a problem in the first place.

8.1.2 Initial work indicated that these activities were being carried out by staff not trained in marketing and education skills. It was also clear that initiatives were developed and promoted in individual sections without any co-ordination, such that the Council could be competing with itself for media and public attention. There was also little evidence of any attempt to measure the impact of marketing activities.

### 8.2 Investigations Undertaken

8.2.1 To investigate whether these initial perceptions were correct and, if so, whether they were significant

- **consultation** was carried out through a Citizens' Panel survey in July 2002<sup>7</sup> to try to identify the impact of marketing activities to promote awareness of the City Council's role in tackling noise nuisance and dealing with stray dogs;
- **consultation** took place with Council departments providing services covered by this review to identify current practices;
- the approach taken to promote recycling in two neighbouring districts was **compared** to try to identify best practice;
- the Team **challenged** the Council's current approach through **consultation with private PR professionals** to seek ideas on best practice.

### 8.3 Results of Investigations

8.3.1 Tables 7 and 8 below show the results of public awareness on whom to contact concerning problems with noise and with stray dogs. As will be seen, there was good recognition of the Council's role in dealing with noise problems but less knowledge of the role of the Council in dealing with stray dogs. In considering these results, it needs to be acknowledged that local publicity by the City Council will have lower levels of impact than messages appearing in the local and national media. Most programmes and items looking at noise nuisance that appear in local and national press, radio and TV will mention the role of the local authority. However, when promoting the dog warden service, the Council will be in competition with programmes such as 'Animal Hospital' which shows the RSPCA dealing with lost and abandoned pets and wild animals – by implication, stray dogs.

8.3.2 Interviews with teams whose work contributes to the environment revealed an acknowledgement of the importance of promoting services to raise public awareness. Whilst the discretionary nature of this work has resulted in it being seen as a "fill-in" to providing more direct works, a degree of good practice was noted, including:

- Landscape team advice and support to various bodies, parishes, environmental groups etc
- Community Services co-ordination of “In Bloom” events, hanging basket provision, community events etc
- Health attendance at summer shows, usually with targeted campaigns
- Series of leaflets in Development Services and Environmental Health
- Environmental Health assistance and support to Winchester Litter Pickers
- Support to campaigns including Bike Week, Alternative Transport Day etc
- The Council newspaper ‘Insight’ also places significant emphasis on environmental issues, with most editions containing several articles across all environmental services.

8.3.3 However, there was little evidence of co-ordination across services. Most work in this area is funded fortuitously rather than through planned budgetary provision. No department has clear communication strategies or targets for what such work is really trying to achieve. Consequently, the commitment is ad-hoc and achievements variable at best. There is no consistent corporate co-ordination of effort, ideas, resources or expertise in this area, nor evidence of shared learning.

8.3.4 Through discussions with neighbouring authorities, local PR consultants and research of approaches in other areas, no consistent best practice could be identified. The commitment to promoting local awareness was approached very differently from one organisation to the next.

8.3.5 For example, one neighbouring District Council invested over £100,000 on community engagement when launching their latest waste collection initiative (appointing a team of specialist communication staff and producing regular high quality published material). By contrast, another has adopted a more minimal approach, contacting public purely through leafleting and letters. Both achieve very good recycling rates. However, whilst awareness has yet to be tested, anecdotal evidence (mainly officer opinion and press coverage) would indicate a greater degree of success being achieved through the first approach.

8.3.6 Discussions with neighbouring authorities have revealed that the approach in this City Council (ad-hoc, opportunistic and inconsistent) is not uncommon. However, many do have some form of communication strategy. Winchester is currently working on such a strategy for all communications.

8.3.7 Advice from PR consultants suggested that there is no right or wrong approach. However, being clear on the overall message, who your audience are, which channels are most effective to reach those audiences and also having a clear idea on what you hope to achieve from the communication were cited as fairly obvious good practice.

#### 8.4 **Options considered for driving service improvement**

##### **Option 1 – Stop providing the service**

8.4.1 The Council would be able to fulfil its statutory duties without producing more than basic publicity and information about its services, with this producing an initial saving in both staff time and costs associated with production of written material. It is difficult to calculate the extent of this cost, as resources used are spread across many budgets.

- 8.4.2 This approach is not recommended. There is increasing expectation for Councils to ensure that they engage with communities about the services they offer and provide information in a number of different formats. Where the aims of the Council can only be met by persuading the public to change their behaviour, such as with recycling, then additional thought has to be given to how the concept is marketed and supported by clear and consistent messages through a variety of media.

**Option 2 – Make No Change**

- 8.4.3 Although there is little clear evidence as to the impact of the Council's current approach, it does provide a stream of information to local people, both directly and through the media, and generate local publicity.
- 8.4.4 The fact that there is little evidence as to the effectiveness of the current approach is in itself a concern, although this is a very difficult area in which to demonstrate a clear link between what is produced and what this results in, particularly where many agencies are producing information. There would appear to be the potential to do better and, given the importance of this area to achievement of Council aims, this should be developed.

**Option 3 – Enhance the service within the existing resource base**

- 8.4.5 As a start it is proposed that all departments should produce clear "marketing" or communication plans, detailed within their business plans, setting out the aims of key marketing or communication work, identifying key audiences, demonstrating how these can best be reached and considering how success can be evaluated. These could be linked to the development of the City Council's Environmental Strategy (see Chapter 4 above), which will help highlight targets and audiences.
- 8.4.6 These should also be corporate co-ordination of campaigns, activities, leaflet production, environmental messages etc through the Council's PR Unit or other central post. This may only be possible at a fairly basic level within the present levels of resources. Again, the proposed Environmental Strategy would give an opportunity to provide a framework for this co-ordination of activity.
- 8.4.7 Within this framework, opportunities should be sought to work with neighbouring authorities or, nationally, through professional networks to influence and participate in joint campaigns that will give added weight to campaigns that support the Council's priorities.
- 8.4.8 The need for additional staff training and development in marketing and PR skills was considered but rejected by the team, as it was considered that sufficient skills had already been developed and further training would side track staff from their prime role in their own profession.

**Option 4 – Invest in further service development**

- 8.4.9 The approaches outlined in Option 3 above would undoubtedly be enhanced if there was additional support from a PR / marketing specialist, either by increasing staff numbers in the Council's PR unit or through the appointment of PR consultants to co-ordinate efforts across departments. The latter approach is already used in Housing and more specifically in Development Services to support Alternative Transport initiatives. This approach would be useful in supporting efforts to target messages, hit key audiences and co-ordinate efforts to best effect. It would not totally replace existing department

efforts, simply support them and arguably add a degree of professionalism and marketing expertise to the work.

8.4.10 In the Council's current budget situation, it is unlikely that new resources could be identified for such support unless it is very clearly linked to one of the Council's priority areas or able to attract external funding support.

**8.5 Recommendations**

- 8.5.1 Chapter 4 above recommends that an Environmental Strategy be developed. This strategy will require a clear action plan. It will also need to identify who target audiences are, what messages need to be communicated etc. It is therefore proposed that a co-ordinated communication plan be incorporated as part of this work, identifying the most appropriate marketing activities which will assist the delivery of the strategy. This will be prepared in consultation with all relevant sections and with the PR Unit to ensure that it ties in with the developing Communications Strategy and draws on their expertise.
- 8.5.2 As part of this work, each department would need to identify their contribution and develop clear action plans for their own service areas.
- 8.5.3 This approach would provide corporate co-ordination, expert support and guidance, cross department links, sharing of expertise and effort and general awareness of priorities. It will build on the good work already taking place in departments and seek to give 'added value' by helping to focus on key messages.
- 8.5.4 For this to work effectively, it will be necessary to identify a lead officer for the Environmental Strategy and that same "champion" will need to ensure that the communication elements of that strategy are developed in accordance with the suggested approach.

**Table 7 – Awareness of Council’s role in tackling noise nuisance**

12 If you wanted to seek help in tackling a persistent problem with noise, who would you contact? (NOTE: Answers have been ranked by N/R*)		First	Second	Third	N/R*
H	<b>Winchester City Council</b>	24.6%	22.6%	13.8%	39.0%
E	<b>The person responsible for the noise</b>	44.0%	5.3%	5.6%	45.1%
F	<b>The Police</b>	9.3%	16.5%	20.9%	53.3%
C	<b>Your local councillor</b>	8.1%	12.8%	12.4%	66.7%
B	<b>Hampshire County Council</b>	8.1%	7.4%	7.8%	76.7%
A	<b>The Citizens’ Advice Bureau</b>	5.4%	8.3%	9.5%	76.9%
D	<b>Your local Parish Council</b>	6.6%	10.0%	6.2%	77.2%
G	<b>Your Solicitor</b>	0.7%	2.4%	8.9%	88.1%
I	<b>Other (Please state who)</b>	Environmental Health (16 comments) MP (6 comments) Would depend on the nature of the noise (4 comments) Housing Association (4 comments) Noise abatement (2 comments) Neighbours (to see if they are also concerned) (2 comments) Environment Agency (2 comments) Advice line / yellow pages (2 comments) Residents’ Association (1 comment) TVBC (1 comment) HSE (1 comment) Other (2 comments)			
J	<b>I wouldn’t know who to contact</b>	<b>5.4%</b>			

**Table 8 – Awareness of Council’s role in dealing with stray dogs**

13 If you wanted help to deal with a stray dog, who would you contact? (NOTE: Answers have been ranked by N/R\*)

		First	Second	Third	N/R*
F	<b>The RSPCA</b>	45.7%	26.7%	8.9%	18.7%
E	<b>The Police</b>	15.8%	17.8%	20.4%	46.0%
C	<b>A local animal sanctuary</b>	8.4%	17.9%	19.3%	54.4%
G	<b>Winchester City Council</b>	14.7%	12.5%	13.4%	59.4%
A	<b>A friend or neighbour who is good with dogs</b>	13.4%	3.4%	6.8%	76.4%
B	<b>Hampshire County Council</b>	0.7%	2.4%	5.8%	91.1%
D	<b>Your local Parish Council</b>	0.6%	1.7%	4.9%	92.8%
H	<b>Other (Please state who)</b>	Vet (25 comments) Dog Warden (18 comments) Deal with it myself (5 comments) Try to find owner (3 comments) Would not get involved (3 comments) Seek further advice (2 comments) Other (3 comments)			
I	<b>I wouldn’t know who to contact</b>	<b>2.9%</b>			

\*N/R – The percentage of respondents who did not select this option as their first, second or third choice.



## 9. Light touch reviews

- 9.1 During the course of the review, the Team identified a number of issues that it felt were worthy of further investigation but where, for a variety of reasons, the extent of the investigation would be more limited than with the major 'in-depth reviews' that have formed the substance of the preceding chapters. In these cases the Team carried out 'light touch' reviews
- 9.2 The 'light touch' reviews were kept proportionate to the issue being considered and did not always address the 4'c's (challenge, consult, compare and compete).
- 9.3 The following chapters look at the 'light touch' reviews undertaken. In some cases it will be seen that the issue raised was addressed during the course of the review process and action has already been taken. In a couple of cases, it was recognised that more work is required and recommendations are made to that effect.

## 10. Light touch review – climate change

- 10.1 Climate change as an issue is growing in importance. Scientists agree that human activity is influencing the climate, and recent extreme weather events have shown what life could be like in the future. It is clear that both mitigation (reducing effects from our activity) and adaptation (dealing with the climate changes that will happen) are needed, and this has implications for many of the services and activities of the Council and, as such, is emerging as a key strategic risk in work being undertaken to develop a risk management strategy.
- 10.2 In 2002 the Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and De Montford University looked at progress being made by local authorities to recognise and address climate change<sup>20</sup>. This found that only 7% of councils had developed a climate change strategy and 68% had not considered the effects climate change will have on them or how to address them. Winchester City Council has formally signed up to the Nottingham Declaration but has yet to prepare a climate change strategy. The Climate Change issue is still fairly new, and so there are limited opportunities to learn from other authorities.
- 10.3 This is a new issue for the Council, and work is only just beginning on how to tackle it. The Council will be taking part in The Carbon Trust's *Local Authority Carbon Management Programme*, due to begin in August 2004. Through this programme it will benefit from additional resources and expertise.
- 10.4 This service was not looked at in depth as part of this review because
- Work within Council is at early stage so there is currently no 'service' or current activity to review;
  - the Council's implementation of the Home Energy Conservation Act, a major area of work that seeks to reduce a major source of carbon dioxide, known to fuel climate change, was subject to an in-depth review (see Chapter 7 above).

10.5 Under the Nottingham declaration, the Council is committed to developing a strategy or action plan to address the issue of Climate Change and the need for this is strengthened by recent work on the risk management strategy. This will be achieved with the help of the Carbon Trust, working through their programme. As this is due to begin mid-2004, work will be done before then to identify current council activities which relate to climate change and to gather information for the Carbon Trust Programme.

10.6 **Recommendation**

10.6.1 That a climate change strategy be produced looking at both action needed to adapt to predicted changes in weather patterns and action that can be taken to help reduce the impact of further climate change.

## 11. Light touch review – abandoned cars

11.1 Nationally there has been a significant increase in the number of abandoned cars over the last few years, as, in order to comply with more stringent environmental legislation, car breakers yards now charge to take vehicles reaching the end of their life, whereas once they would pay for them.

11.2 The City Council area has been affected by this trend with the number of abandoned cars increasing over the last three years as shown below:

Year	Number of Cars reported as abandoned
2000/01	370
2001/02	559
2002/03	672

11.3 The July 2002 survey of the Citizens' Panel<sup>7</sup> found that 73% of people did not consider abandoned vehicles to be a problem, with 20% describing them as an infrequent, minor problem and only 1% considering them to be a frequent and major problem (see Table 4 in Chapter 3 above).

11.4 In line with other refuse collection services, the City Council is responsible for collecting abandoned cars and Hampshire County Council is responsible for their safe disposal. In fact the City Council carries out the full service, with disposal costs then reimbursed by the County Council. Within the City Council, the Licensing Section in the City Secretary and Solicitor's Department is responsible for administration. Environmental Health Client Services use their frontline staff to place notices on vehicles in conjunction with their other duties which necessitate daily site visits.. Staffing levels in the Licensing Section were increased in 2002/03 to help address the increased demands on the service.

11.5 This service was not looked at in depth because the degree of public concern caused is limited and because, at the time this Best Value Review commenced, the County Council's audit service was undertaking its own review of this service across the County. The final audit report has yet to be received from the County Council. The draft drew attention to a small number of areas where administrative procedures could be strengthened and these are being discussed with the County Council.

- 11.6 The major area for change in this service in the next few years will be the End of Life Directive which affects the method of vehicle disposal – including suitable licensed sites, methods and contractors. However, the County Council as disposal authority is taking the lead on this aspect. The City Council is liaising with them so its service can take account of the necessary changes as these are developed.
- 11.7 Proposed changes in legislation may make it easier for Councils to reclaim their costs from the owners of abandoned cars in future and this will be addressed as and when opportunities arise.

## **12. Light touch review – Environmental Protection Team**

- 12.1 Environmental Protection is a specialist service within the City Council. It covers noise control, service requests, air quality, contaminated land, recreational water and radiation sampling. The City Council is under a statutory duty to investigate all complaints of nuisance made to it and take appropriate enforcement action. The service is subject to policy and procedures drawn up in consultation with Members in addition to a number of Codes of Practice and Government guidance.
- 12.2 Public perception of the service can be measured in terms of the numbers of complaints dealt with in comparison to the number of Ombudsman referrals made and the complaints that are put through the Departmental complaints procedures. In 2001 and 2002 there were 8 complaints made through the departmental complaints procedure and 2 Ombudsman complaints in 2001. To put it into perspective the team deal with over 450 noise complaints a year.
- 12.3 The local branch of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) has developed a scheme for the benchmarking environmental protection services within all local authorities throughout Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The audit covers the key functions all the key functions of the service with the aim of:
- Establishing if systems, practices and procedures are in place, which comply with the relevant legislation, government guidance and Codes of Practice;
  - Establishing whether the stated systems, practices and procedures are being followed;
  - Identifying examples of good practice which can be disseminated amongst other authorities and make a positive contribution towards best value.
- 12.4 As part of the Review process, the service provided by Winchester City Council was reviewed against this benchmark. The audit report was very positive, placing the City Council's services as best in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight<sup>21</sup>. A number of recommendations for improvement were made, which were incorporated into the Health and Housing Department Business

Plan for 2003/04 and are being addressed.

- 12.5 The Environment Protection Service was subject to only a light touch review because
- the initial service review did not reveal any issues justifying an in-depth review;
  - it is part of the Council's Environment Health Service which was awarded a Charter Mark for the third successive occasion in April 2003, meaning that it has been subject to recent independent review;
  - it was due to undergo the audit process described, which would provide independent challenge and comparison. This process did not reveal any need for a more fundamental review.

## **13. Light touch review – out of hours working**

- 13.1 Initial consideration of services covered by this review identified different working practices for dealing with out of hours response to customers in different sections covered by the review.
- 13.2 In particular, the Environmental Protection Section (see Chapter 12 above) runs a formal out of hours service between 1630 on Friday until 0830 on Monday morning, set up to respond to increasing numbers of noise complaints arising outside normal working hours. In contrast there is no formal system operating in the Landscape Section, although urgent problems do arise from time to time particularly in relation to tree and hedgerow protection issues.
- 13.3 Although it was initially intended to look at the differences in these systems as part of this Best Value Review, a more wide ranging review of out of hours working across all service areas was put in hand, co-ordinated through the Personnel Department. It was agreed that these issues would be better dealt with as part of this wide ranging review. That review has still to report and is now being extended to look at the impact that the proposed Customer Service Centre could have on this issue.
- 13.4 In addition, a member of staff in the Environmental Protection Section undertook a review of the 'out of hours' arrangements for that section as part of her college work. This has produced a number of recommendations<sup>22</sup>, which are now being considered by that Section and will lead to local improvements in the service.

## **14. Light touch review – clinical waste collection**

- 14.1 Under the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992, Local Authorities are required to arrange for a clinical waste collection service in their area. A change in legislation led to an internal review of the service in 2001. This resulted in the number of customers being halved, with a reduction in contract payments and the Council's budget of some £16,000 a year. As at February 2004 there were 133 customers requiring a clinical waste collection.
- 14.2 The scale and specialist nature of the service, coupled with the review undertaken in 2001, suggested that there was very limited scope for significant changes or further cost savings. It was therefore only subject to a light touch review. This found that
- Public perception of the service has never been challenged. However, few if any complaints have been received from service users and there would only be limited scope to make changes in response to any consultation.
  - Limited comparative work has shown that all authorities offer this as a free service to householders requiring a collection. The cost of service provision has not been challenged inter-authority given the limited number of service users and the specific legal requirements for its operation.

- Legislation requires that the service should be operated with specific vehicles and containment units. Currently each Local Authority provides its own collection vehicle and operative. At a Project Integra meeting held on in August 2001 Hampshire Waste Services (HWS) offered a complete package of collection and disposal services to cover the whole County on the condition that it included all of the Waste Collection Authorities. It does not appear that all authorities supported this proposal and as a result this option has not been pursued through Project Integra.
- Although a specialist vehicle is required for the service, which only occupies it for one day a week, it is used at other times for removing litter and fly tipping. Therefore there is little scope for any 'economies of scale' to be made by pursuing a partnership approach with a neighbouring District.
- It would be possible for the Council to cease the current door to door collection service and provide instead a series of 'drop off' points in clinics and doctors surgeries. This is not recommended as it would be a reduction in customer care and is likely to mean that some people would be unable to access the service or dispose of clinical waste safely.

## **15. Light touch review – refuse collection for travellers**

- 15.1 As part of an initial review checking that services are provided fairly to all sections of the community, it was noted that the Council does not provide any refuse collection service for travellers, although litter left on sites used by travellers is often of concern to local residents. It was agreed that this should be further investigated by way of a light touch review as it was a limited, service specific issue.
- 15.2 At present, there is a lack of authorised transit camps for travellers in Hampshire, with all local authorities working together to try to identify further suitable sites. Where such sites are established, appropriate refuse collection facilities can be provided.
- 15.3 Where unauthorised encampments occur, it is the responsibility of the landowner to clear up any mess left. Where Council land has been occupied, clear up costs can be significant, with some £15,000 required in 2000/01, although in other years no costs have been incurred.
- 15.4 At present, no facilities are offered to travellers for disposal of domestic waste. The review felt that this should be challenged, with the Council working with the County Gypsy officer to explore ways in which travellers could be encouraged to reduce littering of encampment sites.

## **16. Light touch review – take up of subsidies for the cost of new or replacement wheelie bins**

- 16.1 The Council charges users for the cost of new or replacement wheelie bins. It has a policy to waive this charge for those in receipt of benefits. As a result of

restrictions under the Data Protection Act, it was proving difficult to confirm whether people were in receipt of benefits that could entitle them to provision of subsidised bins.

- 16.2 As a result of challenge made through this review, new practices have now been introduced that allow suitable checks to be made within the Data Protection Act so that those eligible for this subsidy can benefit from it.
- 16.3 Steps are also being taken to ensure that there is a better knowledge about this subsidy.

## **17. Light touch review – specialist services**

- 17.1 As part of the initial review work it was recognised that there were a number of areas where the Council was reliant on a single officer who had particular specialist skills and knowledge. Examples included the Council's tree officer (a second tree officer post has since been created) and Scientific Officer.
- 17.2 There was concern that, from the Council's point of view this would leave the authority without expertise when the officer was on leave, off sick or if there was a gap between appointments. From the officer's point of view, it could mean that there were limited opportunities for career development and little support within the authority in their area of expertise.
- 17.3 This was flagged up as an area for a light touch review, to investigate if neighbouring authorities were in a similar situation and whether there was scope for shared services in key areas, on the lines that are now successfully operating for the Internal Audit service.
- 17.4 Due to lack of time it has not been possible to pursue this work as part of this review. However, staff shortages in key areas has now been identified as one of the key risks facing the City Council and ways to resolve this will be considered as part of the work on developing the risk management strategy.

## **18. Light touch review – air quality**

- 18.1 The Environment Act 1995 placed a duty on local authorities to review and assess air quality within their districts. The Regulations issued with the Act set out compliance dates to meet specific air quality health based objectives. Data collected from two air monitoring stations in Winchester have indicated levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulates that exceed the given standard. This is at odds with public perceptions that view the air quality in Winchester as 'quite good'. Notwithstanding the public perceptions, the monitoring information has resulted in Winchester City Council having to create an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) covering central Winchester and major routes into the town.
- 18.2 The Council now has to develop an Air Quality Action Plan within the next year with the specific aim of reducing levels of pollution to acceptable levels by 2010. The Air Quality Action plan will be open to public consultation.
- 18.3 Some local authorities have appointed environmental consultants to carry out their Air Quality duties on their behalf. Consideration was given to this option

in the early stages however that approach is very costly and Winchester City Council took the view that officers had the necessary expertise, could undertake further training if required and would have the added bonus of local knowledge.

- 18.4 Notwithstanding the importance of this issue, the Review Team recognised that it was already being addressed and did not feel it could give any added value by carrying out an in-depth review.
- 18.5 The City Council is now in the process of developing an Air Quality Action Plan to address the AQMA and is also working to make information about air quality more accessible to the public.

## **19. Light touch review – trees and hedgerows**

- 19.1 The Council's involvement in trees and hedgerows covers the following:
- encouragement of new tree planting – both as community projects and through landscape schemes attached to new development;
  - the Tree Warden Scheme;
  - Protection of Trees – including making, maintaining, monitoring and enforcing Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), administration of applications, and dealing with notifications for tree work and enforcement in Conservation Areas
  - commenting on the impact of new development on trees and giving advice in connection with this, including evidence at appeals;
  - responsibility for the safety, management and planting of trees on its own land;
  - promoting arboricultural best practice through advice and information given by the Arboricultural Officers to other departments and liaison with external agencies and bodies (such as the Forestry Commission and the Tree Council) in connection with tree/woodland matters;
  - the formulation of a Corporate Tree Strategy by the Landscape Section for which the Council has given authority to proceed.
- 19.2 From a public perspective the situation is more confusing as trees on 'public land' can also be the responsibility of the Crown, Highways Agency, the County Council (if they are on County land or highways), or Parish Councils (if they are on local amenity areas). In addition, where dangerous trees on private land overhang the highway, block sight-lines or affect overhead lines etc, the statutory authorities have powers to deal with them.
- 19.3 The City Council has to authorise work on trees if they are covered by a TPO and deal with notifications if they are in a conservation area, so that a TPO can be made if appropriate.
- 19.4 Specialist Arboricultural (tree) officers in the Landscape Section are responsible for making TPOs and dealing with applications to fell or undertake work on protected trees. The City Council and its predecessors have been responsible for making some 1,500 TPOs with about 50 new TPOs being made each year.
- 19.5 At the outset of this review TPOs were not being recorded electronically and considerable staff time was taken researching into paper files to answer



queries from the public and colleagues. A new Tree Officer has now been appointed and work has started to digitise records, at the same time reviewing the old orders, resurveying and revoking these where they are out of date.

- 19.6 Officers also provide information to the public, developers and Parish Councils about all aspects of trees and give talks when invited to do so.
- 19.7 The Hedgerow Legislation is administered within the landscape section.
- 19.8 Members have sanctioned the drafting of a Tree Strategy for the district. A detailed brief, which includes objectives, has been drawn up and parish councils and other stakeholders have been consulted. There has, however been lack of time to take it forward to date. It does remain as a target in the Business Plan and some of the important objectives, such as the TPO review and digitisation are already being achieved, so progress has been made.
- 19.9 Although most of the activities described above fall within the responsibility of the Landscape Section, the Parks and Recreation Section acts as client agent in respect of trees on Council owned land. The two sections work in different buildings, making it difficult for them to ensure that their work is fully integrated.
- 19.10 Most of the key concerns raised during the review about issues relating to trees should be covered by the recommendations included in Chapters 4 (Natural Environment) and 5 (Street Scene) above.
- 19.11 There are on-going difficulties in computerising TPO records and work is in hand to try to resolve these. Computerisation of these records will allow more efficient use of staff time.

## **20. Light touch review – environmental improvement grants**

- 20.1 The Council offers grants to support environmental improvement schemes. An early challenge raised from the staff seminar was whether these grants were really needed.
- 20.2 Grant monies available through the Landscape Section are used in three different ways
  - To provide grants for which community organisations can bid<sup>23</sup> – these also help draw in funds from other sources.
  - To buy in specialist expertise from wildlife organisations to carry out work on behalf of the Council (such as the preparation of a Management Plan for the St Faiths SSSI and a Biodiversity Action Plan for the District (see paragraph 4.3.4 above)
  - to fund Council works designed to improve the local environment (both built and natural) for which no other funding is available – this has included enhancements to the access to public toilets in Bishop's Waltham and tree planting on Council land.

- 20.3 The review found that, while the monies were being put to good use, there was a lack of clarity about the outcomes they were expected to achieve. It was considered that clearer focus on use of the funds could achieve more significant improvements in areas where alternative sources of funding did not exist.
- 20.4 It was also noted that revenue funding for environmental improvement grants has been suspended for two years to meet budget pressures. Unless there is clarity about the value being obtained from these grants, it will be difficult to justify their continued existence, yet it is clear that, without some funding, the Council would struggle to meet its obligations on issues such as the CROW Act and biodiversity.

**Recommended**

- 20.5 That the officer with corporate responsibility for street scene issues, in liaison with the officer with corporate responsibility for countryside issues, review the need for and use of funds currently allocated for environmental improvement grants and make recommendations on the future need for and use of such funding, in time to influence the 2005/06 budget round.

## **21. Light touch review – off site open space provision**

- 21.1 At the start of the review the need for developers contributions towards off site open space provision to be spent within a reasonable time period of the money being collected was recognised.
- 21.2 In response a meeting was held between the Director of Community Services and members of Planning and Legal Sections to discuss ways of bringing forward projects more swiftly to ensure that best value is gained from these funds.
- 21.3 Arising from that meeting revisions to the Open Space Strategy were recommended as follows:
- allocation of money from the Winchester Town Wards element of the Open Space Fund to meet the cost of a short-term contract employee with the remit to initiate projects to meet the open space needs of Winchester Town Wards;
  - introduction of more flexibility into the categorisation of certain schemes as either 'play' or 'sport'. Certain proposals such as skateboard parks are unable under the current guidelines to use the large sums often held in the 'sports' funds as they are classified as 'play' projects;
  - provision of more support and encouragement to the Parishes by writing to Parish Council advising them of the importance of making use of their allocated funds;
  - Combining some Parishes together for sports ground provision where it is unlikely that they will be able to achieve schemes individually.

21.4 At its meeting on 19 March 2003, Cabinet agreed these recommendations and measures.

21.5 This has resulted in:

- greater flexibility in the definition of some activities, with skateboard parks and teenage facilities now being able to draw money from 'sports' funds, with a resultant increase in the speed that these funds are taken up;
- more active Parish consideration of use of available funds;
- active consideration being given to the possibility of developing 'grouped' schemes.

## **22. Light touch review – maintenance of on-site open space**

22.1 The review has raised questions about the adequacy of funding for maintenance of open space provided for new development that is then taken over by the City Council.

22.2 Arising from this, it has been recognised that there would be benefit in undertaking a more detailed review of grounds maintenance.

### **Recommended**

22.3 That the Director of Community Services reviews the grounds maintenance service, with particular attention being given to funding for maintenance of open space.



## Improvement Plan

Action	Target	Who	When	Estimated Resources
<i>General</i>				
1. Produce an Environment Strategy setting out clear aims for the Council's work on the environment, an agreed action plan to deliver these and a marketing strategy designed to focus communications and publicity campaigns.	Better co-ordination of services thereby maintaining and improving levels of satisfaction with the built and natural environment as measured through update surveys (see action 17 below)	Assistant Corporate Support Officer in consultation with relevant Members and officers	Consultation draft available by end September 2004.  Final strategy agreed by end December 2004	40 working days of Assistant Corporate Support Officer time.
2. Relevant Departments to produce a marketing strategies for their services, linking to the agreed corporate framework set out in the Environment Strategy (see action 1 above).	To encourage greater participation in activities designed to protect and enhance the environment, thereby maintaining and improving levels of satisfaction with the built and natural environment as measured through update surveys (see action 17 below).	Managers with responsibility for services covered by this review.	To be included in relevant Business Plans for 2005/06 onwards	2 working days for each manager (in addition to time already spent on these activities).

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Action	Target	Who	When	Estimated Resources
<i>Countryside</i>				
3. Establish clear, corporate leadership for the countryside issues at both Member and officer level, with those designated being given time to carry out this role.	Maintain levels of satisfaction with the quality of the natural environment so that they are no less than those found in the 2002 surveys.	Leader – to allocate responsibility at Member level. Chief Executive – to allocate responsibility at officer level.	Member and officer to be clearly identified by end June 2004.	Officer to allocate at least one working day a month to countryside issues.
4. Establish a partnership for agencies involved in work relating to countryside issues within this District, with links to the Local Strategic Partnership.	Reduce the number of residents who feel that the quality of the natural environment is deteriorating as measured through surveys (see action 17 below).  Improve the perception of the Council as a leader in countryside issues in the follow up to the CPA.	Principal Landscape Architect.	Partnership to be in place by end December 2004.	5 working days for Principal Landscape Architect. 5 working days for new post of LSP Officer (subject to Personnel Committee approval). Staff time to administer partnership (to be defined)
<i>Street Scene</i>				
5. Establish clear, corporate leadership for the street scene at both Member and officer level, with those designated being given time to carry out this role.	See below	Leader – to allocate responsibility at Member level. Chief Executive – to allocate responsibility at officer level.	Member and officer to be clearly identified by end June 2004.	Officer to allocate at least two working days a month to street scene issues.

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Action	Target	Who	When	Estimated Resources
<i>Street Scene (continued)</i>				
6. Carry out a review of cleansing and maintenance schedules covered by the SERCo contract, with a view to ensuring that these are updated and fully integrated.	Maintain levels of satisfaction with the quality of the natural and built environment so that they are no less than those found in the 2002 surveys.  Reduce the number of residents who feel that the quality of the built and natural environment are deteriorating as measured through surveys (see action 17 below).	Director of Health and Housing.	Review to be completed by December 2004.	30 working days.
7. Establish an officer group, including representation from Hampshire County Council and SERCo, with the aim of sharing good practice, reviewing policies together, sharing budgets and agreeing a consistent approach to contract management and service provision in respect of the street scene.	Reduce the number of housing tenants concerned with the state of their estates as measured through the three yearly tenants' survey.	Officer with designated corporate responsibility for street scene issues.	Group to be established by end May 2004 and to meet regularly thereafter.	5 working days of support officer time to establish the group. Time for lead officer to come from allocation identified in recommendation 6 above. Other group representatives to allocate 1 working day a month to cover group meetings and preparation work. Admin. support for group to be defined.

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Action	Target	Who	When	Estimated Resources
<i>Street Scene (continued)</i>				
8. Carry out trials in Winchester Town Centre and on the Highcliffe housing estate with stronger ownership of the street scene given to an individual, to help identify opportunities for better service integration.	As above	Officer with designated corporate responsibility for street scene issues.  City Centre Manager to take responsibility for Winchester Town Centre and DCS for Highcliffe housing estate.	Trials to run from start of July 2004 to end December 2004, with report on their outcome, making recommendations on future approach, to be submitted to CMT and Cabinet before end March 2005.	Time for lead officer to come from allocation identified in action 5 above. City Centre Manager and Director of Community Services to allocate at least one day a month to this trial.
9. Review the potential for rolling out these trials to other areas in due course, including the role for Ward Members.		Officer with designated corporate responsibility for street scene issues.	To form part of report to CMT and Cabinet to be presented before end March 2005.	Time for lead officer to come from allocation identified in action 5 above.
10. Carry out a review of grounds maintenance.	To ensure that this service is operating economically, efficiently and effectively.	Director of Community Services	By end July 2005	10 working days.
<i>Recycling and Waste</i>				
11. Undertake a pilot trial of the agreed revised refuse collection arrangements.	Increase recycling rates to meet statutory target of 36% as soon as possible.  Reduce total amount of waste collected that is not recycled.	Director of Health and Housing	Trial to commence autumn 2004.	£135,000 to be met from bid to the National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund.



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Action	Target	Who	When	Estimated Resources
<i>Recycling and Waste (continued)</i>				
12. Subject to the results of the trial, roll out new refuse collection arrangements across the District.	As above	Director of Health and Housing	To be agreed in the light of the results of the pilot and following consideration of funding options.	Additional cost of between £160,000 and £250,000 per annum. (More precise figures to be available following trial).
13. To introduce revised refuse collection policies across whole District.		Director of Health and Housing	New policies to be introduced from July 2005.	Subject to discussion with SERCo.
14. Agree with County Gypsy Officer approaches that will work to reduce litter left at unauthorised travellers encampments.	To reduce littering at unauthorised encampment sites.	Director of Health and Housing	Approach agreed by end July 2005.	10 working days.
<i>Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA)</i>				
15. Review progress against HECA targets and reconsider the need to redirect Council resources to this activity.	To achieve 30% improvement in energy efficiency of domestic properties between 1996 and 2011, in accordance with HECA targets.	Environmental Health Manager.	Review to be carried out and reported to Corporate Group responsible for sustainability issues by end April 2005	2 working days in addition to time allocated at present for HECA reporting.
<i>Climate Change</i>				
16. Prepare a climate change strategy for the District.	For the Council to be able to respond to the challenges of climate change and minimise adverse impacts that will fuel further changes.	Sustainability Officer	Strategy to be agreed by Cabinet no later than December 2006.	50 working days.

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Action	Target	Who	When	Estimated Resources
<i>Monitoring</i>				
17. Carry out repeat survey of resident's views on the quality of the local environment so that the overall impact of the Council's work, including work undertaken in response to this review can be monitored.	To ensure that the effectiveness of the actions above is regularly monitored.	Officer with designated corporate responsibility for street scene issues.	Field work to be undertaken July 2006 and every three years thereafter.	Research to be carried out through the Council's Citizens' Panel – Research Officer staff time already allocated to support Citizens' Panel surveys.

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- 3c. Service Summary Sheet and Equality Review – Clinical Waste Collection
- 3d. Service Summary Sheet and Equality Review – Refuse Collection
- 3e. Service Summary Sheet and Equality Review – Waste Minimisation
- 3f. Service Summary Sheet and Equality Review – Recycling and Composting
- 3g. Service Summary Sheet and Equality Review – Street Cleansing and Litter Collection
- 3h. Service Summary Sheet – Management of Trees, Grounds Maintenance, Parks & Gardens
- 3i. Service Summary Sheet – Flooding, River management
- 3j. Service Summary Sheet and Equality Review – Climate change, HECA
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