

Comprehensive Performance Assessment Public Space Diagnostic Self Assessment

The four pages that follow set out the Council's response to the four key questions posed by the Audit Commission in respect of the Council's contribution to the maintenance and management of public space and related issues.

Each table addresses one of the questions asked and gives examples of how the Council performing in relation to this issue. Our overall assessment of our performance in this area is as follows:

- we have done a good deal to consult our residents so as to be able to understand their priorities and aspirations and have reflected their views in our Corporate Strategy and other policy documents
- we have responded properly to regional and national policy direction as they affect Winchester even though this has sometimes been uncomfortable
- we have worked hard to reconcile many competing views and been willing to take hard decisions where necessary.
- we can demonstrate that the majority of our services are well regarded and efficiently run. Where there have been problems in service performance these have been actively addressed and improvements are being made, in particular in development control.
- we have been active in developing a partnership approach to service delivery and community work and are learning how to take a leadership role on behalf of the community
- most people in our communities already live in clean and well maintained areas. We have to do more to ensure that all our neighbourhoods reach high standards and deal more effectively with the issues which arise in those that do not through better targeting
- we have not yet done enough to give people easily accessible information about service standards and ways in which to contact the Council
- we have some difficult policy and financial choices ahead, such as those over meeting recycling targets, which will be challenging but which we are committed to dealing with

How well does the Council contribute to the management of the physical environment?

Inspection Focus:

Does the Council secure a high quality environment through new build and maintenance work?

The Council has set out in its Corporate Strategy¹ that it will seek to achieve a high quality physical environment for all residents and actively engage them in the choices and decisions which that requires. This has been informed by detailed research into the views of residents, most recently through questions posed to the Citizen's Panel² and through major consultation exercises³. This is a high priority for the Council because residents have indicated that they value the quality of the built and rural environment very highly. A Best Value review is being undertaken to test ways to improve our work in this area. Residents support the values of 'sustainability' but translating national priorities into local action can be testing. The Council has clearly articulated its position on difficult issues such as the implementation of PPG3 through briefings to Members and parish councils. Major strategic documents such as the emerging Local Plan⁴ (now nearing Public Enquiry stage) and the Community Strategy being developed with the Local Strategic Partnership embody principles of sustainability and direct policy towards achieving a high quality environment. To put its policies into practice the Council has:

- adopted a cross-cutting 'Charter for the Environment'⁵ which sets out the key objectives it has in relation to sustainability issues and is supported by the employment of a Sustainability Officer to lead policy and practical projects. The new Community Strategy will carry forward the principles of the Charter
- an emerging Local Plan which has been subject to a sustainability assessment and which will be in conformity with the County Structure Plan despite the difficulties this has caused. We have also formally adopted a contaminated land strategy⁶.
- a successful record of using Section 106 agreements to secure community benefits in accordance with national guidance which is cited as good practice by in national guidance. We have promoted the preparation of village design statements by communities which are now being adopted as supplementary planning guidance
- a development control service which has improved its performance indicator score for processing planning applications in all categories⁷
- produced a major development area in Whiteley which has very high levels of satisfaction from its new residents as shown in a recent County Council survey⁸
- is working on a new major development area in active co-operation with partner local authorities, regional agencies and in extensive consultation with neighbouring communities – this includes proposals to incorporate an large scale sustainable drainage scheme promoted by the Environment Agency
- won an RIBA award for its one of its own building projects⁹
- consulted residents and businesses on the development of tourism which is crucial to the local economy but which brings pressure to the environment¹⁰
- developed Environmental Health Services that deal with nuisance through a variety of approaches including mediation, a 'hit squad service' for litter and fly-tipping and a partnership approach to air quality issues. The service has achieved a Charter Mark
- taken an active approach to the Disability Discrimination Act with a lead officer identified to lead on physical adaptations to Council property and equality of access to services embodies in corporate and departmental plans

We are aware of areas in which we can improve. Although we are clear about our priorities internally we know that we could do more to communicate these to the people we work with. We also believe that we could do more to make contacting the Council easier and take more

steps to encourage people to report problems at an early stage. We are looking at this through our customer care group. The best value review has also identified the desirability of more work on countryside and biodiversity issues that have not been a high priority to date.

Does the Council help keep the locality clean?

Inspection Focus:

Does the Council deal effectively with household and other waste?

How effectively is the Council cleaning streets and other public places?

The Council recognises the key role it plays in ensuring a high quality environment in both urban and rural areas. It recognises that the way in which deals with issues relating to waste, litter, street-cleaning and general maintenance contributes to the social and economic success of the District as well as helping to meet important national targets. The Council worked strategically and at a local level to help ensure that it meets its obligations in this area.

- The Council is a full partner in the Project Integra scheme which integrates the waste collection and the waste management processes in Hampshire. We are in the top 25% of councils for waste collection/recycling rates¹¹ but the volume of waste generated per household is, on average, rising across the country and we follow that trend. Fortnightly kerbside recycling is already available throughout the District. Council is developing proposals for a new approach to waste collection and recycling aimed at meeting national targets.
- There are 61 recycling points of various descriptions around the District. Improvements are being made to household waste collection points to improve recycling and composting options
- We believe that the quality of parks, play areas, car parks and other public spaces managed by the Council is good and is perceived as good by the public, as evidenced by public satisfaction research.¹²
- Almost all income generated from off-street car parking is recycled into improvements in the quality and maintenance of car parking provision.
- A 'hit squad' team operates to deal with fly-tipping and to clear up other areas which become littered. Ward councillors and parish councils are active in reporting problems and ensuring that they are dealt with effectively. Community volunteers such as the 'Winchester Litterpickers' are encouraged and supported. The Council's web-site carries details of departmental responsibilities, direct line telephone numbers and emergency services
- The Council has not developed an Air Quality Management Strategy because air quality reviews based on results from two permanent monitoring stations have not indicated that this is required.
- The emerging Local Plan embodies the principles of sustainable development and reflects the importance of 'planning' for an District which is well maintained and as free as possible from problems such as noise, inconsiderate parking, poor access to public open space and similar issues.
- The Council has an active 'in-house' programme of waste minimisation, recycling and reduction in energy consumption, including Energy Action Audits of all its principle buildings. The replacement of major plant at the River Park Leisure Centre is being planned with reductions in energy consumption and CO2 emissions a prime consideration.

The Council recognises that it has considerably more work to do in consulting its residents and publicising the changes which are required in

waste collection and minimisation services. It is also possible for us to do more to make the reporting of incidents and complaints easier and this is currently being reviewed.

Does the Council work with partners to improve community safety?

Inspection Focus:

Does the Council provide an effective contribution to the local crime and disorder reduction partnership?

Has the Council (in partnership) been able to secure impact on outcomes as a result of the local community safety work?

The Council has worked closely with the police and other partners to audit community safety issues and to ensure that it is aware of other community issues which relate to the cohesiveness of the community. Over the course of the 1998 – 2001 Community Safety Strategy the rate of domestic burglary fell by 10%¹³, but drug related crime rose slightly. Overall Winchester District has lower than average levels of crime against people and property and some parts of the District have very low reported crime figures indeed. However the fear of being a victim of crime remains high, particularly in relation to burglary in rural areas and fear of violent crime in and around the city centre. Concern about young people with ‘nothing to do’ getting into trouble is a common thread across the District. The Council’s approach to community safety issues is proportionate and evidence based. It has provided resources and taken action where this is justified but it has not allocated scarce resources to provide services which cannot reasonably be justified in a district which such low crime figures and the right fundamentals to ensure that this continues such as a strong local economy and high levels of community involvement in crime reduction.

The Council has:

- published its 2002 – 2005 Community Safety Strategy¹⁴ in partnership with the County Council and Hampshire Constabulary which identifies key issues and mechanisms for dealing with them, and clear targets – such as reducing the number of thefts from vehicles in the city centre by 5%.
- established formal ‘cross-reporting’ mechanisms between community safety work and the work of drug and alcohol misuse services, including those in the voluntary sector
- formed positive relationships with key owners of property, such as Winchester Cathedral, to address specific crime and disorder issues associated with particular public areas
- developed and implemented a Winchester Pubwatch scheme
- agreed a protocol for the involvement of the police in relevant licensing applications and in the management of major local events, such as the Homelands dance festival and the Winchester Hat Fair
- installed a comprehensive CCTV system with over 70 cameras covering the city centre and its car parks linked to a 24 hour control room. Park and Ride car parks and The Brooks town centre car park have won secure car park awards
- created a Community Relations Officer post within the housing service to work on resolving crime and nuisance issues
- worked with city centre traders to develop a diverted giving scheme to discourage begging.
- promoted Neighbourhood Watch schemes particularly in rural areas
- supported the provision of a new women’s refuge to provide accommodation for female victims of domestic violence through the Domestic Violence Forum
- all departmental management teams have been briefed on the Council’s section 17 responsibilities by the Community Safety Officer
- supported safety campaigns aimed at discouraging dangerous and anti-social activities amongst children

- provided financial support for projects to provide safe places for young people to meet and to participate in recreational activities such as the wheeled-sports facilities at River Park Leisure Centre and grant aid provided to parish council schemes.
- worked closely with licensed premises and placed specific crime reduction requirements on those where this is justified

The Council and its partners intend to remain vigilant in relation to community safety issues and to tackle specific 'hot-spots' and issues as and when they arise. It will consider devoting additional funding to this area if and when the need arises.

Does the Council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?

Inspection Focus:

Does the Council have a clear idea about the needs of children and young people?

What is the Council doing to secure a range of activities for young people and encourage their positive engagement?

The Council does not have a statutory duty to provide more or better services to young people than it does to other sections of the community. However, it recognises the importance of creating a social and economic environment in which young people have opportunities to fulfil their potential and to use their free time in a way which suits them without being destructive to the peace of others. Citizen's panel research and research for the Cultural and Community Safety Strategies has identified this as a high priority issue across the District.¹⁵ The Council sees young people as an integrated part of the community and the emerging Community Strategy will incorporate aims and objectives relevant to young people. A separate 'youth strategy' has not been prepared because the Community Strategy should be able to fully address the range of relevant issues. The Council is working closely with partners to address issues relating to young people. In addressing its responsibilities to young people:

- the Council's Cultural Strategy¹⁶ identifies better leisure and cultural provision for young people as a particular priority
- the Winchester Town Forum (consisting of the 18 elected members representing Winchester town wards) recently surveyed school children at the three state secondary schools on a range of issues generating over 2,500 replies. This survey will be rolled out to rural schools later this year. The information received was fed into a public session on youth issues and to recommendations on priorities for expenditure to Cabinet
- the problem of letting young people know about the huge range of services and activities on offer, many of which the Council has no direct involvement in, is being considered as part of the response to the Cultural Strategy. Web-based or text services would appear to have most potential
- we are an active member of the Winchester Young Person's Agency Group which brings together statutory and voluntary agencies which work with young people, including the County Youth Service, YMCA, Connexions and our council of voluntary service
- we financially support a large number of organisations working with young people in urban and rural areas¹⁷
- the Council's emerging Social Inclusion strategy will highlight the importance of measures to ensure a good start in life for children and young people
- the Council has actively supported the development of new Children's Fund projects at seven locations across the District
- the Council runs a Rural Youth Theatre Network which gives young people in rural areas opportunities to create and perform their own work
- young people have been consulted specifically about the content of the proposed city centre development through the attendance of local councillors with publicity material at a regular young people's disco held at the council's leisure centre
- the council has adopted Child Protection measures for its own staff and volunteers and has actively promoted child protection

awareness to sports and arts organisations with which it works.

Co-ordination of the many services being aimed at young people is difficult, especially in rural areas where they are small in scale and fragmented. Young are easily bored or turned off 'institutional' approaches to engagement. At present the Council is not pursuing approaches such as 'youth councils' which have had limited success elsewhere, but is developing more direct approaches to consultation and engagement. Resources are an issue. The Council reduced some of its grants to organisations working with children and young people this year to meet budget pressures, but is looking to restore the level of funding if resources can be redirected to this area.

References

- 1 Winchester City Council Corporate Strategy
- 2 Citizen's Panel Survey Results December 2002
- 3 Examples include the Future of Winchester Study, consultation on the Local Plan, consultation on the Cultural Strategy, consultation with young people in Winchester (March 2003)
- 4 Winchester District Local Plan
- 5 'Charter for the Environment' updated January 2001
- 6 Contaminated Land Strategy adopted January 2002
- 7 Performance Indicator returns for development control service 02/03
- 8 Report of findings of research by Miller Associates on behalf of Hampshire County Council Autumn 2002
- 9 Public Conveniences Market Lane 1999
- 10 Citizen's Panel Questionnaire results September 2001
- 11 Audit Commission Performance Indicators 2001/02
- 12 Citizen's Panel Survey results October 2000
- 13 Hampshire Constabulary crime figures reported in Community Safety Strategy 2002 - 2005
- 14 Community Safety Strategy 2002 – 2005
- 15 Research findings for Cultural Strategy held on specific file in Community Services Department
- 16 'Winchester's Cultural Strategy' – document approved December 2002
- 17 Schedule of recent grants available from Community Services Department