

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND CLEANLINESS OF THE BOROUGH

Submitted by: Head of Operations – Roger Tait

Portfolio: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

The report responds to the new administrations stated priority for a clean and tidy Borough, setting out the current activity and approach to achieving Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness, and it's effectiveness.

Recommendations

- (a) That the information be received.**
- (b) That the improved level of performance in respect of Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness be noted.**
- (c) That the current approach to achieving Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness be endorsed, and ongoing initiatives be supported.**
- (d) That performance in relation to Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness is regularly reported to Cabinet as part of the emerging corporate performance management framework.**

Reasons

To ensure that performance in relation to Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness is maintained.

1. Background

1.1 The National Issue

Litter and the impact it has on our communities and local areas is a huge problem across the country. Over 30 million tonnes of litter are collected from our streets every year and it costs council tax payers £885 million a year to clean the streets of England.

- 2.25million pieces of litter are dropped in the UK every day.
- 48% of the population admit to dropping of litter.
- Smoking related litter is the most prevalent item of litter on England's streets found at 81% of all sites surveyed in 2009/10.
- Fast food litter was present on 24% of sites surveyed in 2009/10.
- Members of the public, who are satisfied with how their area looks, are significantly more likely to be satisfied with how safe they feel in their area.

Anyone that drops litter in a public place is committing a crime and they can be fined under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. The fine is between £50-£80 and if not paid a magistrates court can impose a fine of up to £2,500.

1.2 Impact

Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) is defined as “physical condition of the local environment to which the public has access or which they can see, whether public or privately owned, relating to general appearance as well as the management and maintenance standards which are evident.

Research has demonstrated that there are clear cross-cutting links between local environmental quality and other policy agendas:

Health	Clean, safe, green infrastructure has a vital role in ensuring mental and physical health. Studies demonstrate the links between clean, green areas and improved health outcomes including reduced obesity levels, reduced depression and improved social justice.
Community Safety	Satisfaction with place, perceptions of anti-social behaviour and the role of place making and good design are intrinsically linked. Good design and high standards of maintenance and cleansing are vital in reducing anti-social behaviour and other environmental crime.
Economy	Local environmental quality impacts on local economies by increasing property prices, supporting high streets and providing real value of green infrastructure to local people.
Carbon Reduction	Local environmental management can have a significant impact on carbon reduction through green infrastructure planning and management, green fleet management and other sustainable practices.

1.3 Measuring Performance

In recognition of the importance of local environmental quality to local communities, the Audit Commission developed a performance indicator for inclusion in the National Indicator Set to measure how local authorities were maintaining their areas. The National Indicator Set was in force from April 2008 until its abolition in March 2011. N195 required local authorities to conduct surveys and measure cleanliness in relation to 4 key areas:

- (a) Litter
- (b) Detritus
- (c) Graffiti
- (d) Fly posting

The surveys covered a sample of different types of sites (housing, industrial etc) which were graded according to their cleanliness in respect of the key areas.

Results were expressed as a percentage of the total number of sites surveyed which fell below the minimum acceptable standard of cleanliness.

Therefore, a low percentage result indicates a high level of cleanliness.

Other performance indicators relating to local environmental quality were also incorporated into the National Indicator Set, including indicators relating to fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and public satisfaction with cleanliness.

2. Issues

2.1 The Newcastle Approach

The responsibility for street cleansing and litter control removal in a local authority area lies with the district or borough council. Newcastle Borough Council used to have a separate street cleansing team which carried out a range of activities including mechanical road and street sweeping, litter collection and bin emptying.

However this approach was reviewed alongside parks and grounds maintenance operational activities in 2007 and in order to achieve a more efficient and effective service which could deliver improved standards and be more locally responsive and accountable, the Streetscene service was set up.

2.2 The Streetscene Business Unit of the Operations Service is a multi-skilled team of operatives, currently divided into two geographical area-based divisions (North and South) who carry out a range of activities including street sweeping, litter collection, dog fouling collection, fly tipping and graffiti removal, household waste, garden waste and food waste collection, parks and greenspace maintenance and repair, grass cutting, watercourses, tree and woodland management, sports pitches and children's play area and footpath inspection and repair.

The Community Business Unit of the Operations Service works closely with Streetscene and manages the education and enforcement function in relation to environmental issues. This includes visiting and providing advice to businesses in relation to their responsibilities on the control of litter, educational presentations to schools and other groups, organising and managing litter awareness campaigns and civic pride events with, and on behalf of partners, dealing with abandoned vehicles, supporting the corporate enforcement team (which includes the Litter Enforcement Officer) and collecting and monitoring data on environmental issues and offences.

2.3 The Streetscene team works every single day of the year with the exception of Christmas Day and commences at 6am each morning with a schedule of mechanical road sweeping, litter collections and bin emptying at all "Zone 1" areas which include Newcastle and Kidsgrove town centres and a range of other neighbourhood high streets and precincts across the Borough. There are over 100 bins in Newcastle town centre and these are emptied 3 times daily by the electricity powered town cart. "Zone 1" areas are currently cleansed on a daily basis, with litter bins emptied on up to 3 occasions each day, but this is scheduled for review to determine whether limited resources can be redeployed onto other priority tasks, whilst maintaining an acceptable level of cleanliness and meeting statutory requirements.

In addition to this, the team litter picks 1800 acres of green space and empties over 700 litter and dog waste bins across the borough on varying frequencies, from daily to weekly according to levels of use and need. 662 tonnes of litter is collected each year. All streets and parks footpaths in the borough (approx 640km) are swept a minimum of 4 occasions per year and leaf clearance is carried out in October and November annually with approximately 580 tonnes collected and recycled. Street sweepings are also recycled (1544 tonnes were collected for recycling last financial year).

Other daily tasks may include removal of fly-tipping, removal of graffiti (racist and/or offensive graffiti is removed from all sites with 24 hours of it being reported) and removal of fly-posting.

2.4 The Community team also works every day except Christmas Day, with the park attendant service patrolling parks and green spaces on a mobile basis and carrying out reactive litter picking and clearance work. The park attendant service also work closely with the Community Development Officer, who is responsible for co-ordinating and supporting the work of community volunteers and partners across the Borough in carrying out a range of green space projects and litter clearance in local neighbourhoods under the banner of the emerging Community Engagement and Participation Framework.

This area of work is expanding and developing in a very encouraging way and there are now programmed activities taking place every week in some parks and neighbourhoods, which is adding value to the scheduled work the Streetscene teams carry out.

The Community Team adopt the “educate before litigate” approach to environmental issues and the Environmental Officer and Assistant Environmental Officer work closely with Streetscene, the Recycling Strategy Team and the Corporate Enforcement Team to provide advice and support to local businesses and to deliver a programme of educational visits to schools to influence attitudes towards litter and waste and to encourage a positive attitude towards responsibility for the environment. This is considered preferable to taking an automatic, and perhaps disproportionate, enforcement approach.

Litter picks and civic pride events are also arranged and supported with local schools and LAPs/Parish Councils or other community groups.

A strategy is being developed to identify “hot spots” for litter and other environmental issues and to direct community volunteer resources towards these areas. New groups are being encouraged to form where current gaps exist and efforts are further supported by the Community Wardens and by partners such as the Probation Service Unpaid Work Unit.

In some cases, and usually as a last resort, enforcement action is appropriate and the Council has adopted the power to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's)for littering which carry a fine of £75 (reduced to £50 if paid within 10 days).

The Council has employed a dedicated Litter Enforcement Officer in the corporate enforcement team since April 2011 and to date over 700 FPN's have been issued.

The Community team support the corporate enforcement team in a number of areas by collecting and providing information on issues such as fly-tipping and the team also manages abandoned and untaxed vehicles on public land.

2.5 Performance

Performance in relation to the clearance and control of litter has been measured in a number of ways in recent years, most notably through the National Indicator Set referred to in section 1.3 of this report.

The following is a summary of the Council's performance in NI195: Local Environmental Quality and other indicators since 2008/09 which shows a consistent, year on year improvement and compares very favourably to national results. It is relevant to note that this has been achieved in a corresponding period in cost reductions for the service.

Performance Indicator	2008/09 Outturn	2008/09 Target	Qtr 2 Actual	Qtr 3 Actual	Qtr 4 Actual	2009/10 Outturn	2009/10 Target	2011/12 Target	Qtr 2 Actual	Qtr 4 Actual
NI 195 - % Improvement in street and environmental cleanliness (levels of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly posting)	9.3	10	7	10	11	7.66	9	9	6.17	6.79
a) litter	13.6	10	7	19	15	13.33	9	9	7.78	9.32
b) detritus	2	3	2	3	1	2.33	3	3	3.17	2.65
c) graffiti	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0.83
d) fly posting										
Satisfaction with parks and green spaces [BV119e] (yearly)	68	75	-	-	68	62.1				

In addition to this, further performance indicators relating to the Community Engagement and Participation Framework are being developed to gauge the amount of volunteer time spent on environmental projects and the impact this has made on local communities.

2.6 The Next Steps

To be able to sustain and continue this journey of improvement in a climate where resources are diminishing, it is important to regularly review how work is planned, managed and resourced.

This “service challenge and review” ethos is embedded in the Operations Service and has been demonstrated by the way the Service has developed from the creation of the Streetscene service in 2007, through a number of restructures and efficiency measures (£750,000 savings in the last 4 years) to its current format.

2.7 The service is continually striving for improvements and in order to assist in achieving this, the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) has been engaged to facilitate a diagnostic review of Streetscene to highlight areas of the service which are performing well and to identify areas for a more in depth analysis to determine if future efficiencies can be driven out. Employees from the service, including managers, supervisors and peers, will participate in the review and a report will be produced to outline the findings in late summer of 2012.

2.8 The other main thrust of improvement planning for the service is in developing and expanding the Community Engagement and Participation Framework to harness the significant community volunteer and partner resource which is latent in the borough.

The early signs in this area of work are very encouraging and the database of volunteers continues to grow in both capacity and capability.

2.9 It is important that alongside the above initiatives, the message about the negative impact of litter and environmental crime continues to be communicated to as wide an audience as possible.

There are a number of organisations, most notably Keep Britain Tidy, who run publicity campaigns to put this message across and to encourage people to take pride in their environment and get involved in keeping their neighbourhood clean (love where you live).

The Council is running a litter awareness campaign during the summer to coincide with Keep Britain Tidy's campaign, and has adopted a number of current themes such as the European Football Championships, London Olympics and Diamond Jubilee to help attract attention and engage public interest.

- A "Spring Clean for the Queen" event was held in Newcastle and Kidsgrove town centres on 1 June 2012 where local businesses assisted council officers and members in litter picking the area to tidy it up for the Jubilee celebration weekend.
- A new mechanical road sweeper has been purchased and fitted with panels displaying the slogan "Have some pride" to encourage people to look after their neighbourhood and not drop litter.
- A 3 day "Big Knutton Tidy Up" event was organised on the greenway in the locality with volunteers from the local community and the partners where 22 tonnes of litter was collected and removed.

Numerous other events are planned for the summer to keep momentum going and it is hoped that further volunteers can be encouraged to come forward to join in the campaign to keep the borough clean.

3. **Options Considered**

- 3.1 Options for service improvement will be developed as part of the diagnostic review referred to in section 2.7.

4. **Proposal**

- 4.1 That the information be received.
- 4.2 That the improved level of performance in respect of Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness be noted.
- 4.3 That the current approach to achieving Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness is endorsed and ongoing initiative be supported.
- 4.4 That performance in relation to Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness is regularly reported to Cabinet as part of the emerging corporate performance management framework.

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 5.1 To ensure that performance in relation to Local Environmental Quality and cleanliness is maintained.

6. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 6.1 Creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough.
- 6.2 Creating a Borough of opportunity.
- 6.3 Creating a healthy and active community.

6.4 Transforming our Council to achieve excellence.

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

7.1 The Council has a number of powers and duties in relation to litter control and clearance as set out in the Environment Act 1990, the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and other statutes.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

No adverse impacts have been identified as a result of this report.

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

9.1 Provision is currently made in the Council's General Fund Revenue Programme to meet its statutory requirements in relation to litter clearance and control.

9.2 There are no new financial or resource implications arising directly from this report.

10. **Major Risks**

10.1 To be added.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 This report does not result in major new expenditure or savings for the Council. It impacts on all wards and has been included in the Forward Plan.

12. **Background Papers**

12.1 To be added.