

Service Inspection Report

May 2007



Waste and Street Scene Services

Torridge District Council

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Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*.

Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater co-ordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under section 13 of the 1999 Act.

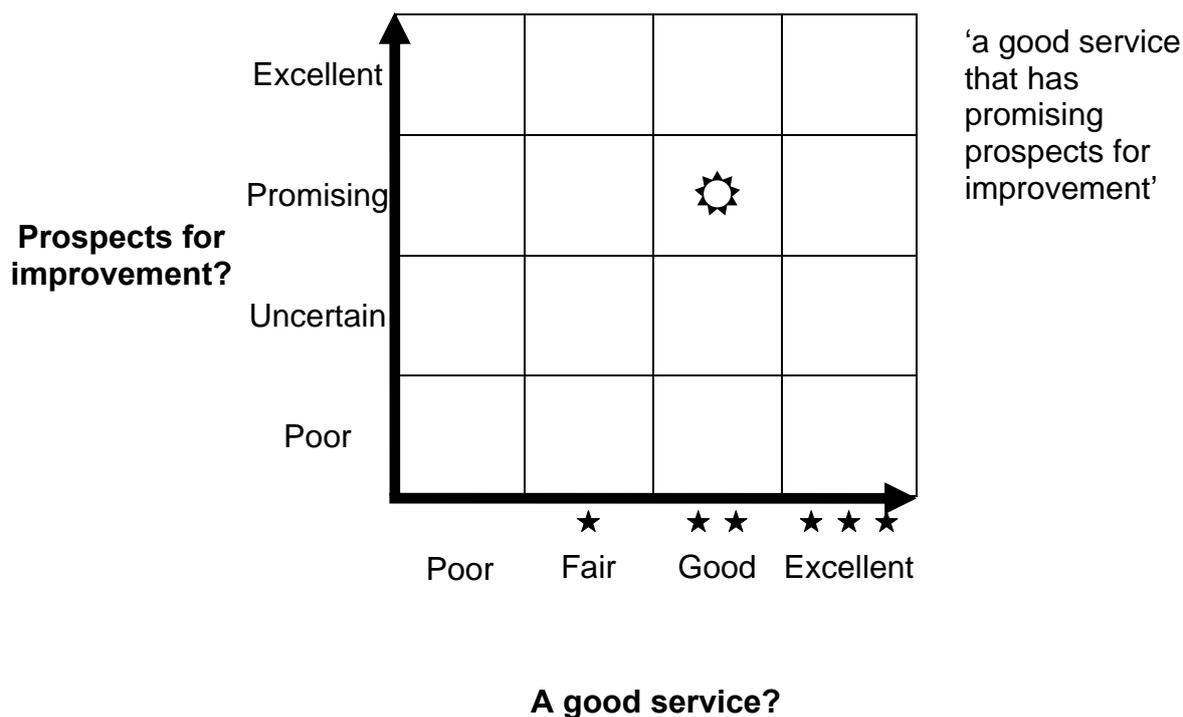
Summary

- 1 Torridge District Council provides a good waste management and street cleaning service and there are promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 The service is good because performance is among the best 25 per cent of councils for recycling and the cleanliness of the streets. Recycling of seven different recyclables is available to the majority of residents, either through a box collection scheme or recycling pavilions across the district. Satisfaction with recycling and the delivery of the waste service is evident. The service has met the majority of its targets for 2005/06. Beaches at Westwood Ho! are cleaned well in partnership with other organisations, retaining blue flag status. Incidences of dog fouling are dealt with effectively through prevention and enforcement, abandoned vehicles and fly-tipping are removed quickly. Residents are satisfied with the service and through local surveys consider it reliable. Expenditure is controlled through effective procurement of appropriate equipment and vehicles fit for their purpose. Consultation is undertaken and in the majority of cases results in an improved service for customers. Contacting the service is easy with efficient and effective responses to enquiries. Some initial work has begun to reduce the Council's environmental impact. However, corporate aims to minimise waste and deliver better enforcement and education activity are not in place, and neither is a structured and agreed corporate approach to reducing the Council's overall impact on the environment. The service cannot fully demonstrate it is as cost effective as it could be.
- 3 The service has promising prospects for improvement because there is strong performance improvement in recycling and street cleanliness over the last three years. Underperformance is monitored well at councillor and senior management levels, with actions put in place to address poor performance. The streets are cleaner and satisfaction with cleanliness has increased. There is a strong track record and good leadership in place that has seen improvements in other priority services. Capacity has been increased through training and the re-organisation of waste service rounds. The service has reacted positively to consultation, improving some aspects of service delivery arising from consultation exercises. Corporate and business planning has improved significantly, as has the method of allocating resources to corporate priorities. The Council's approach to delivering better value for money and improved equalities and diversity is underdeveloped and work to improve education and enforcement activity is behind schedule.
- 4 Clear strategies are in place for the service, as are business plans, however, they lack ambitious targets. Strategic scrutiny of the service is underdeveloped and the opportunity to deliver, through partnership, a better service at a lower cost has been slow until recently. However, because of recent and rapid developments there is a strengthening strategic local waste partnership with North Devon District Council. Detailed plans are not yet in place but there is clear commitment from both councils and an emerging action plan and timeline to initiate a North Devon Waste Partnership. The ability to make efficiency savings and service improvements as a result look promising.

Scoring the service

- 5 We have assessed Torridge District Council as providing a ‘good’, two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Table 1 Scoring chart¹:



Source: Audit Commission

- 6 The service is a good, two-star service because:
- recycling performance is among the best 25 per cent of councils;
 - recycling is widely available, collecting seven different types of recyclables from 99.3 per cent of households and at 45 recycling pavilions. Garden waste collection is available to 71 per cent of residents;
 - cleanliness of the street scene is among the best 25 per cent of local authorities and cleaner than in previous years;
 - beaches are clean, dog fouling is dealt with effectively, as are fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles;

¹ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- overall the service is providing residents with good value for money with average service costs, good levels of satisfaction and good outcomes, as well as controlled expenditure and effective procurement at a service level;
- the service is reliable and recent surveys show that residents are satisfied with the street cleansing, recycling and waste collection service;
- the public can be clear about what the service offers as its standards are well advertised and adhered to by staff who deliver it. Information on the service is available through the website, and printed literature sent to each household;
- consultation is undertaken, listened to and in the majority of cases results in better services to the public;
- it is easy for users to contact the service, resulting in efficient and effective responses to their enquiries or requests for service delivery;
- the Council has begun to reduce its environmental impact and deliver real changes to its use of natural resources in its buildings; and
- at a service level the approach to equality and diversity is evident through employment and planned training of staff.

However:

- the Council does not actively control the amount of waste it collects from residents;
- the Council's corporate approach to equalities and diversity is underdeveloped and behind other similar councils;
- enforcement and educational activity is unstructured and not effecting changes to residents' behaviour;
- the service does not demonstrate that it is being delivered in the most cost effective way with key partnership opportunities being missed and no clear demonstration that it is as efficient as it could be; and
- robust plans to reduce the service impact on the environment, a corporate aim, are not in place.

7 The service has promising prospects for improvement because:

- a new waste strategy is in place with clear targets for meeting future local, regional and national targets for waste services;
- in the last three years it has demonstrated strong improvements to the amount of recycling and composting it collects;
- the streets are cleaner and satisfaction with street cleanliness has risen;
- resources are allocated to meet the corporate aims in the short to medium term and corporate support is in place to enable improvements to the service;
- leadership is strong and direction is clear at member, senior management and service management levels leading to significant improvements in other priority services;

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- capacity is in place through training at all levels to support corporate needs, as well as better allocation of funding and human resource to priority areas and mentoring support from a more experienced council;
- on a day to day basis the service works well with its Devon-wide partners;
- access to the service is improving through a better website and the initial stages of parish based recycling champions;
- the service listens and acts on customer feedback through consultation and customer contact;
- underperformance is monitored effectively and regularly with intervention and support to the service to improve; and
- corporate planning and service level business planning is significantly improved, with clear methods for allocating funding to priorities.

However:

- the new waste strategy needs further development and resource allocation;
- the corporate approaches to delivering better value for money and equalities and diversity have been slow and although being progressed, remain weak;
- the service has failed to put in place capacity and resources to meet a recognised need for education and enforcement to discourage fly-tipping, graffiti and littering across the district;
- some targets, for example street cleanliness, are not ambitious and have already been exceeded;
- member scrutiny of the service is underdeveloped; and
- the potential for strategic partnerships with adjacent district councils has not been developed through a lack of capacity, missing the opportunity to reduce costs and increase service delivery to users of the service.

Recommendations

- 8 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the council. In addition we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the council should do the following.

Recommendation

R1 Demonstrate and improve service efficiency and value for money in the service by:

- *implementing opportunities to develop strategic partnerships that will achieve more efficient and effective services for users;*
- *conducting productivity/quality reviews to establish how efficient the current operation is and where improvements or further investments are needed;*
- *using technology and business process re-engineering to reduce administration and overhead costs;*
- *using benchmarking data – including human resources and unit costs - to challenge the current service and identify how competitive the service is, and implementing identified improvement needs; and*
- *clearly allocating resources to the waste strategy aims and subsequent actions.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- more efficient services and reduced costs;
- improved challenge and more rapid deployment of new methods and technology to improve services;
- the development of a mechanism to ensure ongoing competitiveness that does not require unnecessary investment in traditional market testing; and
- give confidence to the public in the Council's ability to resource its plans.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by March 2008.

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Establish a structured and joined up approach for regular consultation and communication on waste and street scene issues with diverse communities demonstrating they receive as equitable a service as others:

- *planning for and developing consultation with these diverse communities; and*
- *ensuring equity in all areas of service delivery to all residents in Torridge, considering value for money.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a more equitable service that is available to all communities in Torridge;
- more efficient and effective inter-departmental working;
- greater sense of community involvement in policy making and delivery across these communities; and
- a service that is tailored and routinely amended to meet users' needs and provide equality of access, including diverse and vulnerable communities.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

Recommendation

R3 Maximise capacity to deliver improved education, enforcement and a more sustainable service by:

- *analysing and clarifying a strategic approach to sustainability, education and enforcement activity that is aligned to the corporate priority;*
- *identifying partnership opportunities to deliver such activity;*
- *implementing these partnerships quickly and effectively; and*
- *securing relevant resources to enable these priorities to happen.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved education and enforcement activity leading to a better environment and higher recycling rates;
- the residents of Torridge will understand their responsibilities better; and
- corporate priorities will be achieved for the residents of the district.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

Report

Context

The locality

- 9 Torridge is a mainly rural district in Devon covering 984 square kilometres over 64 parishes. The area has a population of 62,500, about 28,000 households and low population density at 62 persons per square kilometre. Fifty-two per cent of the population live in and around the main towns of Bideford, Great Torrington, Holsworthy and Westward Ho!, the rest live in small villages and hamlets. Torridge's residents have an older profile: the majority of the district's population is aged between 45 and 59 years old. There is an above average population of over 65s at 20.41 per cent compared to the national figure of 15.89 per cent and regional figure of 18.65 per cent. The percentage of the population from black and minority ethnic groups is below the regional and national averages: 97.65 per cent of its population is white British compared to 95.4 per cent regionally and 86.9 per cent nationally.
- 10 Seventy-eight per cent of the district's working age population, lower than the national average, are in employment. The majority are employed in public administration, education and health. Manufacturing accounts for 13.6 per cent of jobs in the district, above the regional and national average. Average earnings are low, with weekly wages of £355.30, significantly lower than the regional and national levels. In contrast, house prices have risen significantly, by 251 per cent over ten years in Bideford. The area attracts a relatively high number of seasonal, holiday visitors.
- 11 Torridge has a relatively high level of deprivation and is ranked 119 out of 354 on the national index of deprivation. Three per cent of the population live in the bottom 10 per cent of deprived areas and 17 per cent of children live in low income households. The district's average rate of job seekers allowance claimants at 2.4 per cent of resident working age people is higher than the regional figure of 1.7 per cent. Average life expectancy is higher than the national average both for men and women. The district has slightly above average educational attainment at GCSE level. Levels of crime are low and are static or decreasing, with the exception of domestic burglaries which increased in 2005/06.

The council

- 12 The Council was scored as 'poor' in the last comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) in 2003, although recent direction of travel assessments have documented a trend of improvement in a number of areas, for example benefits and housing.

- 13 The Council operates a committee system of representation with an elected Council Leader. At the time of the inspection, it had thirty-six elected councillors: the majority party being Independent with eighteen seats, Liberal Democrats with seven, Conservative with five, and six seats to non aligned councillors. There are eight policy making committees: Development and Trading Services, Environment and Leisure, Housing, Northam Burrows, Plan, Policy and Resources, and two Scrutiny Committees. The Council is currently reviewing the number and functions of its committees.
- 14 The Council's structure and senior management have been subject to many changes over the past three years. During this period the Council appointed three chief executives and undertook two re-structuring exercises. The current chief executive was appointed in July 2005. The Council employs 313 staff.

The council's waste and street cleaning service

- 15 The Council last had a waste inspection in December 2001, when it was judged to be a good service but with uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 16 The current service is delivered through weekly black bag collections of waste. Additional services include a weekly box scheme of seven different recyclables to 99.3 per cent of households and a compostables waste collection (garden and cardboard waste) using wheeled bins fortnightly during specified months of the year. There are 45 bring recycling pavilions across the district. The streets and open spaces are cleaned on weekly and monthly rotas depending on area need.
- 17 The scope of our inspection in March 2007 encompassed waste collection, recycling and street cleansing, and includes abandoned vehicles, fly-tipping and dog fouling. We did not inspect the Council's car parks, formal parks or public conveniences. The service areas inspected are some of the Council's most important public facing services.
- 18 The service inspected forms part of the Council's Operational Services. The waste collection and street cleaning services are provided by directly employed Council staff. South Molton Recycle Limited (SMRL), a not for profit social enterprise, provides the collection of dry recyclable materials through a contract which expires in 2009. Viridor Waste Management took over the Commercial Waste Service in April 2002 and remains the district's main commercial waste contractor.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 19** The Council is working in a Devon-wide strategic waste partnership which has an overall vision for the area that recognises the issues they face in dealing with waste and improving opportunities to recycle. The partnership and its constituent councils, including Torridge, adopted a joint municipal waste management strategy called 'Don't Let Devon Go to Waste' in March 2005. The strategy has an overall aim 'to increase the proportion of waste which is managed by options towards the top of the waste hierarchy. These are waste reduction, re-use, recycling/composting, energy recovery and then final disposal by land filling'.
- 20** The Council's strategic plan 'Towards the Future' 2005-2010 identifies the vision for the district which is 'a great place to live, work and visit'. This vision is supported by four goals: an aim to become an excellent council; to improve the quality of life for all; to promote sustainable economic growth; and safeguard the environment. The plan sets out how it will achieve these goals over five years.
- 21** In the goal 'safeguarding the environment' the strategic plan sets out the following aims that are key to this service, which are supported by specific targets and actions:
- reduce the amount of landfill waste and promote energy conservation and recycling initiatives;
 - work towards litter-free streets and public spaces through education, enforcement and investment in these services; and
 - protect and enhance our natural and built environment assets.
- 22** A new draft Waste Recycling Plan and Waste Minimisation Strategy (WRPWMS) 2007 aims to provide 'Clean Streets and Clean District', by refuse collection, recycling, and street cleansing and underpins the Council's strategic plan. The strategy sets out 12 aims for increasing recycling, reducing waste to landfill and increasing people's awareness of environmental issues. Where appropriate these are supported by actions and targets that are linked through to the national, regional and corporate priorities. The Plan defines considerations, decisions, policies and actions necessary to meet the requirements of Government statutory recycling targets for 2005/06 and beyond, the 2010 Landfill Directive, and other forthcoming legislation. Public consultation in 2006 informed the strategy through the Devon Doorstepping Campaign. Its aims are as follows:
- to increase the recycling and composting rate in Torridge;
 - to reduce the total amount of municipal waste arising in Torridge;
 - to raise awareness of the need to reduce waste and conserve resources;
 - to increase the proportion of waste that is managed towards the top end of the national waste hierarchy – reduce, reuse, recycle– putting more wasted resources back into beneficial use;

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- to work towards increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of waste and recycling services including further integration;
- to achieve optimum strategic placement and use of recycling and reuse bring banks and rural pavilion facilities;
- increase participation and capture rates in kerbside recycling collections;
- increase the amount of garden material and biodegradable material diverted from the waste stream for composting to reach targets;
- increase the proportion of biodegradable residual waste paper and card sent for composting;
- increase the range of materials collected for recycling, reuse or composting;
- continue to work to improve the waste education programme provided to schools in Torridge, and implement recycling collections for schools; and
- increase awareness of 'green procurement' practice and continue to develop agreed green purchasing guidelines, internal waste minimisation policies and sustainability principles for the council.

23 The service business plan underpins the strategic plan's goal of 'safeguarding the environment' and supports the WRPWMS. In doing this the service aim is to 'pick it up, take it away, recycle it, clean it up, and keep it clean', through a detailed action plan. For 2005/06 the Council set its own target for recycling and composting at 30 per cent, which matches the national standard set by the Government for Torridge District Council.

24 The Council sets out long term targets for delivery through the draft WRPWMS and the service business plan. Examples of these are as follows.

- To recycle/compost 40 per cent of domestic waste collecting 8,000 tonnes by 2009/10 (matching national targets).
- To increase kerbside collection of compostables to 19,800 properties collecting 6,000 tonnes by 2009/10.
- The estimated amount of waste that will be collected per head of population to be 474.0 kilograms by 2008/09.
- To increase the percentage of abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours of being authorised to 90 per cent by 2008/09.
- To decrease the percentage of land that falls below acceptable levels of cleanliness to 9.0 per cent by 2008/09.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Access, customer care and community focus

- 25** Access, customer care and community focus within the service are good. Residents are consulted and the service responds to the findings. Contacting the service is easy and staff deal with such enquiries efficiently and effectively. Service standards are well publicised and adhered to. Facilities are available to the majority of the residents of Torridge to dispose of their waste responsibly.
- 26** The service is easy to contact, responsive, user friendly and available 24 hours a day for emergencies. A single point of contact telephone number is advertised through the website and on all literature relating to the service. Residents told us that responses during normal working hours are polite, friendly, user focused and normally deal with the issue efficiently during first contact. An out of hours emergency contact number gives the service the ability to deal effectively with more serious issues such as hazardous waste, fly-tipping and severe street littering from the evening economy.
- 27** The Council makes good use of surveys to engage with the public and tailor services to local needs. A survey in 2003/04 shows that the residents of Torridge requested the re-opening of a recycling facility in the town. In partnership with Devon County Council the Council has supplied this new facility which is due to open in May 2007. This has taken some time to come about due to land purchase issues, however, Torridge responded to this positively by supplying the land for the recycling site. This demonstrates that the service has taken heed of public opinion and responded to it well.
- 28** The service responds well to customer complaints and requests for service provision. Complaints via the service helpline, such as missed collections, are dealt with promptly. Crew members often deal with issues directly with the public when the incident happens, giving the public the opportunity to learn and understand immediately how to rectify the problem. Consultation has influenced the introduction of the green waste collection rounds to 71 per cent of the population, the increase of kerbside recyclable collection to 99.3 per cent and in 2007 the extension of compostables collection by a further month. In addition, the service provided an additional 700 kerbside recycling containers to households which requested them. Effective and timely response to customer requests enables better customer service.

- 29 Torridge listens and acts on its consultation with the majority of residents to improve services. Although the service does not have a group of residents that it routinely consults with on waste, recycling and street cleaning issues, the service uses the Council's citizen's panel and one-off surveys with partners to measure customer satisfaction. For example, the recent 2006 'Devon Door Stepping Campaign' in partnership with Devon County Council showed that 86 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the Council's kerbside recycling service. However, there is no focused attempt to engage with diverse communities such as elderly and younger people. It is not clear if the Council understands the service needs of this part of their population.
- 30 Information available to users is good. The Council communicates through the internet, leafleting, local newspapers and parish and town councils. For example, service standards are clear and well publicised. There are also good clear leaflets and literature for recycling promotion and the roll-out of new services that are available at Council buildings. Recent council tax information sent to every household includes updated information on the service and what is available for residents. Performance against national performance indicators is also published. The public are therefore able to see how well the Council is delivering what it has promised.
- 31 The public has good access to facilities to enable them to dispose of waste and litter responsibly. There is good coverage of street and dog litter bins, which are emptied regularly and replaced when broken or too small. Recycling facilities are inclusive and available to 99.3 per cent of households, and there are 45 additional bring 'recycling pavilions' across the district, particularly in rural areas to improve equitable access to recycling facilities. Innovative solutions such as recycling pavilions have been implemented in places like Clovelly where normal kerbside collection is impossible. This ensures access for the vast majority to this service. However, although recycling containers are provided to tenants on request, there is not a joined up or pro active approach with housing to ensure the basic equipment is available in properties when there is a changeover of tenants. All of these facilities are well used by the public, discouraging fly-tipping and contributing to street cleanliness.

Equality and Diversity

- 32 The Council has some way to go to deliver better equality and diversity in its services. While there are some good examples at service level through employment and training, at a corporate level the score against the equalities standard is 0, a long way behind other authorities. Clear and planned attempts to reach diverse communities are not evident.

- 33 The approach to equality and diversity is not fully developed or embedded in all service delivery. The Council's progress at meeting the equalities standard for local government is poor scoring 0 in a five point scale with five the highest - this is worst 25 per cent performance nationally. Assisted collections are provided on request, but are not widely publicised. There are no clear examples of attempts to contact and support diverse communities, for example elderly people. The Council is developing its corporate approach to diversity and equality but it has not yet filtered down and embedded in the service. The Council's standard committee report template requires consideration of equalities, as well as sustainability and risk management.
- 34 Access to the waste management services is inconsistent. Equity of service is not considered routinely or fully when new collections and changes to service delivery are developed. For example, access to organic waste collection cannot be seen to be fair and equitable as 29 per cent of the population in rural areas do not receive collection and no clear plans are in place to improve their ability to compost. The service can evidence that it is selling more home composters, but not that they are promoted or sold specifically to these rural areas. This means that this element of the service is largely delivered in the urban areas rather than rural areas. For the time being, the Council has decided on value for money grounds not to extend it further. However, there are some examples of good access to the service with nearly 100 per cent coverage of kerbside recycling and opportunities to recycle available across the district.
- 35 The Council demonstrates a positive approach to equality and diversity in its employment practices, for example the employment of people for beach cleaning at Westward Ho! in partnership with Devon County Council Social Services, and the employment of those with challenging employment histories through the recycling contract with SMRL. This positive approach enables employment opportunities to people who would normally find it difficult to get work. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of diversity and equality. All staff had fairness and diversity training in January 2006 and demonstrate their understanding of the part they can play in delivering a fair, accessible service. This is reinforced through literature such as a crew information pack concentrating on equitable treatment of customers.

Service outcomes for users and the community and service performance

- 36 The overall service the customer receives is good. Public satisfaction information collected by the Council shows good levels of satisfaction with the service. Streets are clean and tidy, dog fouling and littering is dealt with effectively, and fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles are removed quickly. There is a good range of recycling facilities available to the majority of residents and compostable waste is collected. However, not all enforcement and education activities support or contribute towards less littering and more recycling opportunities for everyone. Other opportunities to recycle are not yet planned for and there is no clear approach to making the service more sustainable and less polluting.

- 37 From independent and the Council's own surveys, satisfaction with the waste collection service is high. The 2006 independent survey shows 90 per cent of the local population is satisfied with the service. In its December 2006 citizens panel survey, 94 per cent of respondents indicated that they found the waste collection service reliable and 77 per cent said that the information provided on general waste collection was clear and concise. The 2006 Devon Door Stepping Campaign of residents demonstrated a high degree of awareness of the Torridge recycling scheme with 86 per cent of respondents satisfied with the kerbside recycling service and 89 per cent saying they participated in it. From local feedback, the service also identified and responded to areas for improvement. For example, better information was provided to residents about the bulky collection service and operatives provide information to residents about recycling when they see contamination in their boxes. Overall the service can demonstrate good levels of satisfaction from local residents with its waste and recycling services.
- 38 The waste collection and recycling aspect of the service is reliable and delivering what it has set out to do. The number of missed bins is low at around two per 1,000 collections and these are usually collected within 24 hours. Any spilt refuse is cleared during collections so the service does not contribute towards street littering. Clear, advertised arrangements are made for alternative collections during public holidays. The crews are polite and committed to the customer. They are empowered to talk directly to the customer when refuse sacks are not properly presented or contain material that should go for recycling, and to pick street litter up when completing their rounds.
- 39 The Council's recycling and composting performance is good and it supports and embraces the national agenda to reduce, re-use and recycle waste. Overall service performance as measured by Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) is above average when compared to other councils. The amount of waste recycled and composted was in the best 25 per cent of national performance at 29.3 per cent in 2005/06. Although the Council missed its own and DEFRA recycling targets by less than 1 per cent, it did meet the 30 per cent target less than four weeks later. In turn, the Council collects and recycles its own compostables and dry waste for recycling across all of its departments. This is setting a positive example to the public who are being asked to dispose of their waste in a similar way.
- 40 The recycling service is reliable and performs well. It is delivered through a partner organisation collecting and source separating seven different types of recyclable material. The 2006 independent survey shows satisfaction that 66 per cent of the population are satisfied with local recycling facilities. Recent underperformance has been rectified in partnership with the contractor, for example, the agreed purchase of three new vehicles and improved customer feedback on the operatives collecting the material. This service is available to 99.3 per cent of the population with an additional 45 recycling pavilions for similar materials available across the district. This gives most residents the opportunity to recycle.

- 41 The Council does not actively control the amount of waste it collects from residents. The introduction of a garden waste collection service from an additional 7,000 homes has increased the amount of waste collected per person in the population from 418.3 kilograms in 2004/05 to 430 kilograms in 2006/07, above average when compared to other councils. No restrictions are placed on the number of black sacks presented for collection. Some schemes are evident through third parties, such as the SMRL shop where old furniture, clothing, white goods and bric-a-brac are re-sold, and the provision of a local 'real' nappy service. This is not enabling the service to meet national targets and will increase its future costs.
- 42 The Council is good at keeping public places clean. There is an effective system of dealing with dog fouling through dog litter bins, recyclable disposal bags provided to dog owners, the animal welfare officer's use of fixed penalties, with 37 in the last three years, and an extensive programme of education and awareness. The Council's beach cleaning has continued to achieve the highest standard. This is illustrated by the continuing Blue Flag status of Westward Ho! Working in partnership with students through the Access to Employment Team (part of Devon County Council Social Services), the beach is well cleaned and maintained. The service has been commended for both cleanliness and innovative use of volunteers. Eighty-seven per cent of abandoned vehicles were removed in 24 hours of being authorised for removal. All fly-tipping is removed within 2.3 days of the Council being aware of its location. At a local level, the service works with parish and town councils to share responsibilities for street and land cleanliness, making best use of volunteer help by providing protective clothing and equipment, and taking away the litter following collection. The cleanliness of these public places improves the environment for the residents of Torridge.
- 43 The local environment is clean and getting cleaner. The most recently published comparative data for 2005/06 shows that only 8.2 per cent of streets had significant littering which is among the best 25 per cent of councils, exceeding the Council's own target of 10 per cent, as well as its 2008/09 target of 9.0 per cent. The street cleansing service is responsive and manages peaks and troughs in workload well, for example, cleaning up after the weekend evening economy at 5.30 am Independent surveys show 71 per cent of the population are satisfied with the cleanliness of the environment. Regularly littered areas, for example around some schools, are cleaned more regularly to ensure they remain clean. Incidences of graffiti are removed quickly and the amount of graffiti is lower than the average for similar councils. However, the public still see the amount of graffiti as an issue.

- 44 The bulky waste collection service offered to domestic customers is responsive and available to all residents. All collections are allocated a date and identified for morning or afternoon collection and the service is subsidised for less financially able residents. In almost all cases these are removed within five days of the customer requesting the service. The service can be booked through the Council's website or over the telephone and paid for in any of the Council's offices across the district. The service promotes the re-use of some bulky collections, such as furniture and white goods, through its existing recycling contractor.
- 45 The service does consider its environmental impact when making decisions. For example, procurement decisions are not solely on lowest cost options, but take into account additional 'green' considerations, such as sustainability, environmental and health benefits. The Council has actively pursued sustainable construction, for example, the Caddsdow business park with rain water harvesting, solar power and heating. Where possible, it recycles instead of purchases or purchases used/serviceable materials, for example refuse and street cleaning vehicles and office furniture.
- 46 There is no clear service based strategy in place for the reduction of carbon emissions, use of more sustainable materials and vehicles and contribution to the climate change agenda. However, there are some good examples of the Council approaching this agenda successfully through its corporate procurement strategy and the work of its corporate procurement team, for example, the Caddsdow Business Park. Within the Council there are recycling and composting schemes for both dry and compostables waste, setting a good example to the service users.
- 47 The Council does not educate all sections of the community to dispose of waste responsibly. Activity to support the reduction of littering and promotion of recycling to secondary school pupils is not comprehensive across the district. The need for this is illustrated by some schools having a significant littering problem during school hours. There is evidence of some good education activity in recycling with Mrs Recycle for schools and local communities. In this case each school has the opportunity to receive such education at Key Stages 1 and 2 of the curriculum. Educating the public fully and consistently is a key tool in reducing littering and increasing recycling further.
- 48 The service's approach to enforcement overall is still embryonic, and investigation and prosecution of, for example, fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles are under-developed. The need for enforcement has been recognised through consultation, in the corporate strategy and in business planning, but no solution has been implemented yet. This is acknowledged and the Council has submitted a bid to its Local Strategic Partnership (LAA) to fund an enforcement officer for a trial period of six months. If efforts are made to collect public opinion about services, the Council should respond more effectively and deliver actions to address such local concerns.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 49** The service is providing residents with good value for money. Its costs are generally at or below average and there are good outcomes in terms of performance and satisfaction. It can demonstrate that it controls expenditure well. Procurement of materials and vehicles is completed effectively. Operating within budgets, service performance is above average when compared to other councils. Some benchmarking does take place and a new approach to delivering efficiencies is being explored. However, the service cannot demonstrate that it is being delivered in the most effective way and therefore as cost effective as it could be. Opportunities to work in partnership have not been fully exploited to create further efficiencies the public will benefit from.
- 50** The value for money mix of cost, customer satisfaction and service delivery performance (through BVPI data) does demonstrate that the service is above average when compared to other councils.
- The waste collection service has a below average cost of £43.07 per resident when compared to other councils. Costs have risen in the last year due to the investment in extending the compostables waste collection to 7,000 homes. Satisfaction with the service, through the Council's own surveys (2006) is good, at 85 per cent. The 2006/07 independent satisfaction survey shows satisfaction with waste collection has remained the same at 90 per cent. From the same survey satisfaction with recycling has risen to 66 per cent. The percentage of waste recycled has risen to 30 per cent.
 - The cost of street cleaning activities is average at £8.72 per head of population when compared to other councils. Independent satisfaction information from 2006/07 surveys shows average satisfaction with cleanliness at 71 per cent, higher than the 2003/04 survey by 8 per cent. The percentage of land that is littered in 2005/06 is very low when compared to other councils at 8.2 per cent demonstrating that the streets and open spaces of the district are cleaner than in 2003/04.
- 51** The approach to budget setting is robust and enables priority areas to be invested in. All growth bids require a budget bid including a business case and this is presented to the senior management team and members for decision. The service also manages its resources well, for example, by responding effectively to seasonal fluctuations in demand, storm damage and unforeseen events.
- 52** New business planning processes enable better financial performance management. Business plans are reviewed quarterly. Service costs are clearly identifiable, separately coded and set out. The accountancy support to the service is good and enables service heads to deliver and manage their budgets successfully. The budget for this service was balanced last year, including reaching Gershon efficiency targets. Robust business planning and performance management enables the service to set out what it intends to do and deliver this to users.

- 53 The service uses collaboration and partnerships in some areas to achieve better value for money, for example by working with parish and town councils on the purchase and installation of dog/litter bins, provision of protective clothing for volunteers and removing litter. In appropriate cases some rounds are completed by an adjacent council and vehicles are often swapped onto different rounds to extend their working life. Other vehicles are purchased on a rolling basis demonstrating the need to purchase is understood and controlled. Although unsuccessful, recent attempts to re-tender an existing partnership contract have shown the recycling service is competitive. Of the eight organisations who expressed an interest, only two returned prices, both exceeding existing levels of cost for the same service.
- 54 At a service level, procurement of materials and equipment is responsible and effective. Purchases are completed ensuring that the best price is obtained and the equipment is suitable for the task it will be used for. There is an awareness of the need to achieve value for money, for example through the cost effective purchase of ex-demonstration vehicles and running vehicles for eight years instead of five. The Council also uses an e-procurement catalogue and actively seeks local providers, for example for laundry, catering, and wood chips. A new corporate procurement strategy to dovetail with the national procurement strategy is now in place, as is a business friendly concordat. However, procurement activity is not delivered consistently across all the Council's services. While the Council has a dedicated procurement team they are not involved across all services. For example, the procurement of vehicles and (non biodegradable) black bags for the waste service did not involve this team. Quantifiable savings from procurement activity in the service cannot be clearly identified and it is therefore not clear if the service is taking advantage of all opportunities to procure more effectively.
- 55 The service's approach to benchmarking is underdeveloped. Although local benchmarking does take place and the service's costs are low when compared to other Devon districts, detailed national benchmarking is not evident. However, the Council has started to explore the use of 'lean thinking' in this service following significant success in other service areas, such as benefits and housing. The initial stages of this work have seen more efficiencies in the reductions in time to rectify missed collections of all types, including fly-tipping. Clear cost benchmarking enables the Council to understand if it is providing an efficient and cost effective service to its users.
- 56 The Council has missed opportunities to take advantage of shared service provision. On 16 February 2005 the Council recognised the opportunity to work in partnership with an adjacent authority. Since this date very little progress has been made with no identifiable and measurable benefits from working in partnership or any opportunities to achieve better efficiencies in service delivery. However, in recent months initial discussions with an adjacent authority have developed and the possibility of partnering has a greater focus than previously. The Council does have a responsibility to the public to actively explore opportunities to reduce costs and improve services.

- 57 The Council cannot clearly demonstrate that the service is cost effective. It has not yet undertaken a comprehensive review of resources, productivity and efficiency of activities to ensure that the Council's investment in these services is delivering value for money. Without a clear understanding of this, the Council cannot be sure of the extent to which contextual factors influence costs either positively or negatively, or if it needs to invest more in this service or drive further efficiencies. For example, the present method of collecting waste has not been properly analysed and tested against other methods of service delivery and therefore cannot be endorsed as the most efficient way of collecting waste in Torridge. The initial stages of fully re-engineering processes have begun and there is a draft project initiation document and project plan outlining the next steps.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 58 The Council has demonstrated that it can deliver improvements at both a corporate level and within the service. Performance and access has improved in most areas of service delivery, however in some cases performance improvement is at a slower pace than other councils. The Council invests to improve its performance in recycling. Working in partnership with SMRL, recycling rates have increased across Torridge and the Council only narrowly missed its 2005/06 recycling target. The investment in a compostables waste collection has further increased the ability to meet recycling targets. Improvements to street cleanliness have been completed within existing resources. However, waste minimisation is not actively encouraged and costs are increasing as a result of the investment in the compostables waste collection. Improvements to deliver better value for money are slow and the delivery of better equalities and diversity is behind other councils.
- 59 Evidence of improvements in the waste collection and recycling services over the past three years is strong. The service has increased its coverage of weekly dry recycling of seven different recyclable materials from 79 to 99.3 per cent of households. From March to October, a fortnightly organic waste recycling service is now provided. In 2006, this was extended to a further 7,000 properties, increasing coverage from 25 to 48 per cent of households which represents 71 per cent of the district's population. Through adapting its methods of waste collection and recycling, the service is now available to some of the more remote or inaccessible areas of the district. For example in some rural areas and communities which are difficult to access such as Clovelly, where the service employs single storage facilities and drop off points.
- 60 Most of the service's best value performance indicators are improving and achieving the targets set by the Council. The Council's performance on reducing land and highway litter improved in each of the last three years from 14.2 per cent in 2003/04 to 8.2 per cent in 2005/06, exceeding the Council's 2005/06 target of 10 per cent and the projected 2008/09 target of 9.0 per cent. It has maintained above average performance. Combined recycling and composting rates increased year on year from 22.6 per cent in 2003/04 to 29.34 per cent in 2005/06. The Council remains in the top 25 per cent of district councils for recycling, however the pace of improvement is below that of the best 25 per cent of councils. The percentage of households serviced by a collection of two or more recyclables has improved in each of the last three years, from being in the lowest performing 25 per cent of district councils to above average. The Council has exceeded the national target for authorities to recycle two materials by 2010, and provides a collection service for seven materials to 99.3 per cent of households. However, the amount of waste collected has risen from 418.30 kilograms in 2004/05 to 430 kilograms in 2005/06.

- 61 The Council's track record of improvement in street cleaning is good. The percentage of land and highways littered has decreased in each of the last three years, without any significant increases in financial or resource capacity. The public feel the area is cleaner with satisfaction rising from 63 per cent in 2003/04 to 71 per cent in 2006/07. The Council has set a target to remove abandoned vehicles within 24 hours and although it has not yet consistently achieved this figure, it has substantially improved performance. Fly-tipping is now removed within 2.3 days, down from 5.3 days in 2006. The amount of graffiti visible to the public is lower than average at 3 per cent.
- 62 In some areas performance has deteriorated. The weight of waste collected per head of population has increased in each of the last three years and the Council's performance in this area of waste minimisation, a strategic plan action, is below average. While the cost per household of waste collection is below average, it increased from £39.39 in 2003/04 to £43.07 in 2005/06. This is in part attributed to the extended waste and recycling services the Council has provided to more households, and external factors including the wide geographical spread in a rural and sparsely populated district.
- 63 The availability of large recycling facilities is increasing. The Council has collaborated with Devon County Council to realize a new public recycling facility at the Caddsdawn Industrial estate in Bideford due to open in the May 2007. This has been enabled by the Council as Torridge supplied the land for this new facility. Within the Council itself, it has rolled out the waste minimisation and recycling pilot it introduced in 2005, including paper, plastic waste, composting and recycling bins at some of its buildings. These initiatives provide more opportunities for both domestic and work recycling.
- 64 The information available to users of the service has improved significantly. The service has invested in better information leaflets in addition to supplementing this through the annual council tax mailing. Although recent, improvements have been delivered in electronic access to information and procedures. The website has been improved, with the ability to report online abandoned vehicles, graffiti, fly-tipping, missed collections, request collection of refuse or bulky items, and complain or comment on the service. Downloadable forms are available, although online payment is not. Clear corporate plans are in place to ensure all the Council's services offered online can be paid for online, increasing customer choice and convenience.

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- 65 Progress in developing the Council's approach to value for money has been slow. This is reflected in the Council's overall score of 1 in the Audit Commission's recent use of resources value for money judgement. However, it is putting the building blocks in place to track and deliver value for money and an integrated approach to monthly monitoring and challenging financial and performance information was introduced in 2006. The Council is able to show developing value for money in its procurement practices across the Council, including benefits to the waste service. For example, the procurement team rationalised mobile phone providers and consolidated billing, and the cost of mobile phone usage has reduced from £27,000 to £9,000 per year (2006/07 Best Value Performance Plan), benefiting the waste service whose operatives use mobile phone while carrying out their work.
- 66 The Council's approach to equalities and diversity is poor when compared to similar authorities. Overall, the Council has been slow to deliver improvements in equality and diversity and is still at equality standard 0, among the worst 8 per cent of councils nationally. It is developing plans to move to equality standard 1 during 2007/08. Within the waste service, progress on improving equality and access is mixed. There is added value in the service provided by partners through their employees and volunteers, for example SMRL successfully trains and employs some operatives who have challenging past employment histories. The beach cleaning service provided by the Access to Employment Team students at Westward Ho! is of a very high standard.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 67 New processes and procedures at a corporate level are enabling the service to manage its performance more effectively. Business planning has improved and clearly supports the direction of the Council. Learning from external challenge and best practice councils is being implemented and the service responds well to public feedback. However, detailed and effective internal scrutiny of how the service operates has not taken place.
- 68 The Council and service demonstrate strong leadership. Following the poor CPA rating in 2003, the Council re-structured its strategic plan, introduced a new innovative performance management framework and successfully implemented its improvement plan. Poorer performing services are now reviewed and more robust business planning introduced across all service areas. Staff indicate pride in their work, with trust in the direction of management and a clear customer focus. Officers and members lead by example, for instance through the successful introduction of recycling within the workplace at Torridge District Council offices. Robust leadership underpins the Council's ability to improve the service.

- 69 The Council has improved its performance management. Strong corporate frameworks are in place to ensure that the Council monitors and is delivering its corporate improvement plan. There is an integrated planning and performance framework which links the strategic plan, business plans and customer focus. Performance management is used effectively to improve performance with partner providers. The service's performance is monitored at a senior level monthly using graphical analysis to assess financial and performance trends and challenge underperformance.
- 70 The service takes corrective action in response to variations in operational performance. For example, reviewing the viability and need for rural pavilions following the extension of kerbside collections to 99.3 per cent of households, with plans to remove those that are no longer viable. Additionally, the service used a weekly monitored improvement matrix with SMRL in 2006 to turn around areas of recognised underperformance. For example, introducing on the spot feedback from operatives to customers to explain why inappropriate items were not collected from recycling boxes. Such performance management enables the recognition of and intervention on underperformance, improving the service for users.
- 71 The Council's strategic and business planning is improving and shows a more integrated, customer-focused approach. These plans are informed by community consultation to identify local priorities. They are linked to the local strategic partnership 2004-2007 community strategy and action plan's second priority of renewable energy, waste minimisation, recycling and energy efficiency, the lead for which is the Council's waste service manager. Under the goal of 'safeguarding the environment', the Council's strategic plan has three over-arching objectives that service business plan actions contribute towards. The medium term financial strategy 2006-2010 demonstrates how funding is linked to this goal, through the resourcing of service aims and objectives.
- 72 There is a clear and detailed annual corporate planning cycle. Progress on the strategic plan is updated quarterly and tracks performance against priorities. The medium term financial strategy and capital appraisal scheme reflect the strategic plan and priorities. Parishes are consulted on budget priorities and the results analysed to inform financial planning and resource allocation. For example public support for more recycling facilities in the district were reflected in 2006 by extending the kerbside collection of compostables waste to 7,000 more households, and also will be realized in 2007/08 with the new Devon County recycling facility being constructed in Bideford on district council land.

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- 73 Service business planning has improved. Comparison of the 2005/06 and 2006/07 waste service business plans shows that they are becoming more robust and SMARTer³. They contain financial data, clear targets and more broadly based, cross cutting planning information including risk assessments and equality impact assessments. There are clear links to the strategic plan and regional priorities, for example the recycling plan clearly links to the Devon-wide waste strategy. Service plans for 2007/08 require identification of new income opportunities and cashable and non-cashable efficiencies. However, the final link in this chain down to individual staff level is not yet in place, as staff appraisals were not re-introduced until the last quarter of 2006/07. At project level, the service has some comprehensive plans including those involving partnerships, for example the Beach Management Plan for Westward Ho! Beach which includes staffing resources from Devon County Council Social Services.
- 74 The Council is improving its approach to meeting local priorities and wider environmental aims. This is reflected in their draft 2007-2010 Waste Recycling Policy and Waste Minimisation Strategy (WRPWMS). This describes the regulatory and strategic framework in which improvements will be delivered, including local context and current performance. It sets out the actions needed to meet or exceed the requirements of Government statutory recycling targets for 2005/06 and beyond, the 2010 Landfill Directive and other relevant legislation and to address sustainable waste and resource management issues at local level. It states strategic, operational and aspirational goals, provides the underlying policy summaries, outline timing and actions with best value and local indicators to measure performance. However, although some targets are set, the timing of actions needed is broad and therefore in the short and medium term targets are unchallenging. Publishing clear timings against goals enables users to understand when the Council will deliver its aims.
- 75 The service responds positively to customer feedback, best practice identification and its own performance monitoring. Feedback from the Citizens Panel and the recycling survey in the Summer 2006 highlighted a lack of understanding of what can be recycled and what the service offers to users. As a direct result, a memory jogger was distributed to each household to illustrate what can and cannot be recycled, as well as information on services such as bulky waste collection. Visits to other authorities to observe their work have resulted in the introduction of the parish recycling champions' concept from East Hampshire and a mentoring relationship is planned for 2007. However, the service does not have a dedicated consultation group for waste and recycling to continuously monitor performance and test ideas on.

³ Specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time bound

- 76 The Council has robust corporate plans in place to improve its approach to value for money. Benchmarking is used in the waste service to compare costs and performance, mainly through routine best value performance indicators, local benchmarking information and through the annual use of resources value for money review by the Audit Commission. The Council does not actively benchmark on a national scale with councils that measure service delivery in a similar way. However, it is beginning a programme of being mentored by East Hampshire District Council as part of the Waste and Recycling Beacon Peer Support programme. Through this peer support, diagnostic benchmarks are developed to identify potential areas of improvement within a local authority's recycling and waste service which can then be incorporated into the existing improvement plan.
- 77 Access to the service is improving. The website is easier to use and the user can request service delivery online. Clear plans are in place to ensure all the Council's services can be paid for online. Initial work to develop parish based champions for recycling is encouraging although not yet supported by a robust timetable and plan for delivery of the whole project. This group, if planned for and delivered well, will provide a good platform to enhance and improve the service through parish councils.
- 78 Future service targets are clear but not ambitious. Through the draft WRPWMS and the business plan recycling targets are set at 32.9 per cent for 2008/09, only 2.9 per cent above 2005/06 levels and 7.1 per cent short of the 2009/10 draft WRPWMS target of 40 per cent. Street cleanliness targets for reducing the amount of visible litter are set at 9.0 per cent for 2008/09, above 2005/06 actual figures of 8.2 per cent. The percentage of household waste collected is targeted to increase, against national guidelines to reduce the amount of waste collected. These targets are not ambitious and in some cases actually worsen the existing service. However, through the draft WRPWMS the waste service aims and priorities are clear, are agreed and resourced. For example, targets for recycling and waste minimisation match national targets set by government and the medium term financial plan shows increased investment in the service.
- 79 The Council is not planning for, or taking full advantage of, opportunities to recycle. Vegetable waste makes up 31 per cent of the waste stream and there are clear countywide plans to develop disposal capabilities for this waste (Devon Municipal Waste Plan, 2003 figures). However, the Council does not collect or have clear plans to collect this waste for recycling in the future. The affordable collection of such a large part of the waste stream would reduce the amount of waste taken to landfill.
- 80 Member scrutiny of the service is underdeveloped. There has been no internal review of the waste services during the last three years as the Council has reviewed other, poorer performing services as a priority. The Council is revising its overview and scrutiny arrangements to simplify and strengthen them. However, there is no clear plan or timetable for the delivery of any scrutiny or review of this service. Pro-active and effective scrutiny plays a key role in improving service delivery to the public.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 81** The Council has the capacity to maintain a good level of service delivery and its past track record on capacity has delivered improvements to the service the public receive. Current budget planning and control is effective. Staff are provided with the training and equipment needed to undertake their current roles. Resourcing is confirmed in the three-year medium term financial plan for revenue and capital for all of the Council's four goals, including 'to safeguard the environment'. Any required improvement work is budgeted annually through budget bids. However, the detailed work on capacity to accelerate improvement and deliver more challenging targets over the longer term is still being developed. For example, the long term waste strategy recently approved in Spring 2007 remains to be developed into detailed, resourced action plans. The service has failed to secure extra capacity through existing and possible future partnerships.
- 82** Overall the Council has a developing track record of putting key building blocks in place to drive and deliver improvement. In-depth reviews and process re-engineering have been carried out in some poorer performing service areas, such as housing and benefits, resulting in improved performance. Achievement of the corporate improvement plan has been promising, as stated by IDeA and the Audit Commission. Staff roles have been realigned to deliver services and there is an improvement board which monitors the corporate improvement plan regularly. Officers and members are clear about their roles and work co-operatively together. Improvements in business planning procedures, service plan requirements linked to the medium term financial strategy and an established capital appraisal scheme enable services to focus on clear agreed priorities and targets each year, without being distracted by short term challenges or wins. These initiatives impact positively on all services, including waste and street cleansing. For example, the waste management service has achieved 76 per cent of its priority actions and the majority of its performance indicators have improved.
- 83** The service manages its existing resources well. It has operated within its budget while delivering improvements, for example the extension of the kerbside recycling provision and improvements to the cleanliness of streets were both achieved by re-organising rounds and making them more efficient. It accommodates peaks and troughs in demand through the summer season, sickness absence and annual leave.
- 84** The Council is maximising its capacity through the allocation of resources to priorities. The budget setting process is transparent and enables the Council to make difficult decisions around budget and local priorities. For example the decision to discontinue the provision of black bags to all households, starting in April 2007, was completed in consultation with parish councils, considering higher budget priorities and realising the diversion of £62,000 to these priorities. This enables the customer to see clearly why funding for services of lesser priority is removed.

- 85 Human resource capacity is developing well. Senior managers have all received training on performance improvement and re-engineering their services. The Council has targeted implementation of single status, developing an equality policy and re-introducing staff appraisals in 2007. All waste service staff had equality training in 2006 and received information packs concentrating on the equitable treatment of customers. Staff feel they receive the training they need to carry out their work effectively. Sickness absence levels for the service are low at 3.68 days for the first three quarters of 2006/07. These actions improve the capacity of staff to deliver the service.
- 86 Investment in a corporate procurement team and a procurement strategy and green purchasing guide is increasing capacity and delivering savings. These include rationalising mobile phone provision and billing and recycling office furniture and equipment. The Council has delivered an award winning sustainable office building project at Caddsdawn. However, the use of the procurement service is largely reactive and is not consistently used by all Council services, including waste.
- 87 Effective use of external funding and partnerships is increasing the capacity to deliver better services. The service is able to demonstrate several examples of successful external funding and effective partnership working to increase capacity. Through the Council's recycling provider, funding of £300k from the Community Recycling and Economic Development Fund (CRED) was used to expand the dry recycling service in the district. It participated in the Devon-wide 'Don't Let Devon Go to Waste Campaign' (DLDGTW), benefiting from a joined up approach with a larger budget to raise awareness. Similarly, it worked with Devon County and the district councils on the 2006 door-stepping campaign to survey residents to assess recycling awareness, attitudes and needs. By working with Devon County's Social Services through the Access to Employment Team programme, the service has provided valuable work for students and delivered a high standard of maintenance at Westward Ho! beach.
- 88 The Council works well in partnership with the County Council and other Devon district councils. The opening of a new recycling site in Bideford in 2007 demonstrates a commitment to such partnerships. The Council allocated land to support the public need for this facility and ensure it is available. Managers and staff attend Devon-wide waste forums, sharing best practice, implementing the approach to and meeting the needs of the DLDGTW in delivering its own waste strategy. This has realised a modern facility the public can use that would not have been available without this partnership working.
- 89 The service takes into account county and regional strategies. The Council is part of the Devon-wide strategic waste partnership. The partnership adopted a joint municipal waste management strategy in March 2005. The service's future plans, expressed in their new waste strategy, state that they will work with Devon County Council and neighbouring authorities to meet the requirements of an integrated waste management strategy in Devon. This is also reflected in the Council's Strategic Plan.

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- 90** The Council has clear financial plans in place for the short and medium term through its three-year medium term financial strategy 2006/07-2009/10. Its strategic plan for 2005-2010 contains four goals, including to safeguard the environment, underpinned by the following aims: to reduce the amount of landfill waste and promote energy conservation and recycling initiatives; work towards litter-free streets and public spaces through education, enforcement and investment in these services; and protect and enhance the area's natural and built environment assets. The medium term financial strategy incorporates these aims and financial allocations to them for revenue and capital. The annual budget planning process ensures that there is a clear commitment of resources and commitment for approved annual plans for the service's maintenance and improvement. The work to develop action plans and to assess and allocate resources needed to realize it is the next stage of work to be undertaken.
- 91** The service has failed to deliver better education and enforcement capacity. Since 2005, service business plans acknowledge the need for improved enforcement activity. Consultation results indicate that the public have requested more enforcement activity. Lack of progress has been attributed to a shortfall of resource to fund such activities. However, the service has not explored more innovative solutions to increase capacity such as partnership working with other councils or using existing capability from internal departments. This is a significant gap in provision and is not fulfilling the needs of the community. However, the Council has submitted a bid to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for funding to trial an enforcement post in 2007 for six months. The draft WRPWMS does aim to increase education and enforcement activity to support the strategy.
- 92** The Council has not taken advantage of opportunities to develop clearly available strategic partnerships to improve service delivery and reduce costs to users of the service. Despite the clear potential advantages of working in partnership with an adjacent council, very little progress has been made despite initial direction being given by members as early as 2005. Until very recently, partnership and joint delivery options have not been extensively explored to identify the additional capacity they could bring to the service, for example with North Devon District Council and SMRL. A lack of strategic capacity at senior level has weakened the drive to meet this agenda.
- 93** However, because of recent and rapid developments there is a strengthening strategic local waste partnership. Proposals have been developed and are now under discussion between Torridge District Council and North Devon District Council to progress this partnership quickly. Detailed plans are not yet in place but there is clear commitment from both councils and an emerging action plan and timeline to initiate a North Devon Waste Partnership. The ability to make efficiency savings and service improvements as a result look promising.