



SCRUTINY FORUM EXECUTIVE

Report of the
SCRUTINY PANEL
into
STREET CLEANSING

26 January 2001

SCRUTINY PANEL - STREET CLEANING

MEMBERS:	Councillor M Blanshard (Chair) Councillor R Briggs Councillor M Fearnley
LEAD OFFICER:	Tony Gerrard, Head of Resources (Education and Community Services)
COMMITTEE ADMINISTRATOR:	Darren Tones (Tel. 01484 221709)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About the Panel

- * The Panel constituted three Kirklees Ward Members. Councillor Maggie Blanshard as the appointed Chair accompanied by Councillors Rita Briggs and Margaret Fearnley. Tony Gerrard, Kirklees Council's Head of Resources (Education and Community Services) and Darren Tones from the Council's Committee Services acted as support to the Panel throughout the process.
- * The Panel was truly "lay" in its knowledge of the issues involved in Street Cleansing but all brought an awareness of the implications from their own Wards which could influence the way in which the Service was provided in future.

1.2 About the Review

- * The Panel was asked to undertake its role by Kirklees Council's Scrutiny Executive, the group of Councillors who under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000 were charged with the responsibility of investigating and monitoring the relevance and effectiveness of Council Services and other agencies and their decisions.
- * The review involved obtaining the observations of the public, other organisations, Council Services and elected Members. The Panel welcomed the positive responses received from those individuals and organisations keen to participate in the Review.

1.3 Terms of Reference

As an early part of its work the Panel agreed its Terms of Reference to the Scrutiny Executive as being:

1. To review the quality of output of street cleansing and related activities and the associated monitoring procedures.
2. To compare the cost of current service provision with that of comparable Local Authorities.
3. To examine options for moving from input based to output based requirements.

4. To review the co-ordination of work programmes and methods of supply.

1.4 The Work of the Panel

- * The Panel sought to try and develop an overall awareness of the issues impacting upon the Street Cleansing Service.
- * The Panel held open public meetings in discussion with various specialists on Thursday 27 January 2000, Friday 3 March 2000, Thursday 23 March 2000, Thursday 13 April 2000, Wednesday 24 May 2000, Wednesday 28 June 2000, Thursday 31 August 2000, Tuesday 26 September 2000 and Monday 30 October 2000. A press statement about the Panel's work was also released and views sought from members of the public and external organisations.
- * The Panel undertook a site visit to obtain the views of the Cleansing Direct Services Organisation manual street cleansing staff, interviewed and took observations from Manchester City Council and the Tidy Britain Group; it considered written evidence as part of the benchmarking process to undertake comparisons with other Local Authorities. The Panel has also taken views from Kirklees Council's Environmental Waste Services, Environmental Services, Cleansing Direct Services Organisation, Highways Service, Leisure and Recreation Service, Housing Services and the Corporate Development Unit together with undertaking a systematic review of appropriate legislation.
- * The strength of the Panel's work is its capacity to take an overview from the outside and to view the activities that are taking place from a different perspective than those individuals and organisations who are operating within the system. Discussions with specialists at meetings have encouraged comments not merely on their own specialism but on their understanding and perceptions of all issues related to street cleansing; these perceptions and issues have subsequently been tested out by the Panel.
- * The work of the Panel has been progressed in the full knowledge that a Street Cleansing Best Value Review was being undertaken. Wherever possible, care has been taken not to duplicate effort. Information has been shared, in particular the results of an extensive public consultation exercise, but, in the interests of objectivity, there has been no joint discussion.

2. THE STREET CLEANSING SERVICE

2.1 The National Situation

- 2.1.1 A recent survey by the Tidy Britain Group revealed public disappointment at the state of Streets, Parks and the Countryside, with a recorded 80,000 complaints during 1999. On the rare occasions where legal action was taken, half the 422 litter offenders fined by Local Authorities failed to pay the fine. The study also revealed a marked reduction in the number of prosecutions for littering which reduced from 2,500 in 1990 to approximately 500 during 1998.
- 2.1.2 The Tidy Britain Group claims that the Litter Laws require revision as for the past decade Councils have been allowed to employ special wardens issuing on the spot fines. However, only a fifth of Councils administered such a scheme. Most Local

Authorities claim they cannot afford to meet the cost of enforcing the Litter Laws. The problem has worsened due to a sharp rise in illegal fly tipping as official disposal facilities increase their charges as a result of the levied Landfill Tax.

2.2 The Local Situation

The Panel has received comprehensive presentations and background literature on the Street Cleansing Service. Set against the backdrop of the National view, the Panel has therefore identified and acknowledged the current financial and service pressures which exist together with the challenges and opportunities for the Service in the future.

3. REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Consultation

3.1.1 Tidy Britain Group

Consultation was held with the Tidy Britain Group with consideration being given to how the performance of the Street Cleansing Service could best be monitored. Their proposals included examination of the use of the following as a measure of effectiveness:

- * The Cleanliness Index
- * Public Education - Effectiveness
- * Involvement with Schools
- * Cleaning Systems
- * Anti-Litter Projects with Environmental Groups

3.1.2 Workforce

The Panel undertook a site visit and interviewed manual workers employed by the Cleansing Direct Services Organisation. In addition, information relating to focus groups, carried out as part of the Service's Best Value review, was considered by the Panel. The key issues arising from these were:

- the emphasis on quantity of work done rather than quality
- lack of co-ordination between different Services, particularly around the area of weed clearance
- the public's lack of responsibility regarding litter disposal, although in some areas/streets people were particularly conscientious
- the condition of equipment and, in some instances, perceived poor design
- the condition of clothing, particularly boots and jackets
- the absence of adequate toilet and eating facilities on some rounds
- poor communication, difficulties in attending meetings, and limited access to relevant training opportunities

3.1.3 Members

All elected Members were issued with a questionnaire as part of the Best Value review; 27 responses were received. The key issue identified by Members was the

speed of response to telephone enquiries. The main issues raised by their constituents were: the standard of street cleansing; litter problems; illegal tipping; location of litter bins; and, gully emptying.

Whilst acknowledging that constituents were more likely to contact their local councillor when there was a problem, and that there were some positive comments received, the overall impression from this part of the consultation was a view that there was room for improvement in the street cleansing service.

3.1.4 Public

The Panel issued a press release to invite the views of the public in respect of the Street Cleansing Service. Twelve responses were received, varying from specific complaints or compliments to more detailed suggestions for improvement. The specific areas for improvement identified were routes to and from schools, takeaways and well-used public footpaths.

A detailed telephone survey of service users was carried out by The Leadership Factor, with the target of achieving 500 replies reflecting the ethnic mix across the district. This detailed survey highlighted the importance attached to a number of street cleansing issues, most notably: the cleanliness of local streets, town centres, footpaths and parks; ease of contact; and the number of times roads are swept. Satisfaction levels were uniformly low when compared with other forms of service industry. In almost all areas the gap between importance and satisfaction was significant. Kirklees scored in the bottom 36% of all service organisations in the consultants' database. In comparison, the survey for refuse collection carried out at the same time, showed high levels of customer satisfaction.

Whilst these results did need to be treated with some concern, the Panel considered that the different nature of the services provided must have some bearing on likely levels of satisfaction i.e. refuse collection was a self-contained process whereas the scope for street cleansing was almost infinite, due to the constant proliferation of litter. The consultants did not possess sufficient information on other street cleansing operations to make a statistically valid comparison. However, they did acknowledge that the refuse collection score was particularly high for that kind of service, whilst that for street cleansing was not particularly low.

In receiving the findings of the Customer Satisfaction Survey, the Panel noted that there was a perception problem in that the public were of the opinion that they did not receive regular Street Cleansing services when there was clear evidence to the contrary. It was considered by the Panel that the public was underestimating the speed at which the areas could be covered by litter following cleaning and it was felt that a higher visibility service, particularly in densely populated areas could reverse public perception and influence customer satisfaction.

In addition to the areas of importance identified above, adverse comments were received regarding weeds, dropped litter and dog fouling.

3.2 Benchmarking Comparisons

- 3.2.1 The Panel considered the Service performance of the Cleansing Direct Services Organisation based on performance indicator statistics. The national indicators relating to Street Cleansing were "the percentage of streets that were of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness" and the "cost per head of population per annum". Appended to this report is a graph comparing these indicators for all Metropolitan Councils which identifies Kirklees as the second lowest spending Council per head during 1998/1999 together with being above average in relation to cleanliness.
- 3.2.2 The Panel noted the position of Kirklees in comparison with other Local Authorities recognising that high standards of service were provided at low cost within the terms of the existing input-based contract. Nevertheless, the Service view was that the public perception of a clean Street was for it to remain free of litter; this would lend itself to an output-based specification which could also lead to greater efficiencies.
- 3.2.3 The Director of Operational Services of Manchester City Council attended a meeting of the Panel to provide an overview of that Council's Best Value Review which had incorporated the function of Street Cleansing. The Panel was informed that the Service was multifunctional and undertook to provide a wide variety of activities which were business orientated and budget driven with a clear focus on cost and quality. The Service encompassed street cleansing, highway maintenance and grounds maintenance personnel.

The Service had achieved 'Investor In People' status; employees were provided with the opportunity of an interview with their Line Manager for discussions to be held regarding objectives and targets for the Service whilst any training requirements or development opportunities could be identified.

The cost per head in Manchester was significantly higher than in Kirklees although it was recognised that the difficulties faced by Manchester as a major commuter centre and 'twenty four hour city' would have a significant bearing on costs.

- 3.2.4 Whilst undertaking Benchmarking Comparisons the Panel acknowledged that monitoring systems between Local Authorities differed with regard to the measurement used to produce performance indicators and that any results needed to be accepted with caution.

3.3 Service Performance

- 3.3.1 The Panel considered the practice adopted in respect of Street Cleansing monitoring which included a random sample of all Streets, footpaths and other areas for each quarter. An inspector was allocated to areas within the District to grade particular streets in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. Inspectors were required to look for the causes of litter and propose solutions and also take necessary action where streets were below a particular standard. It was noted that where action was advised, a further inspection would be undertaken after the next scheduled sweep and, if the condition remained poor, the Cleansing Direct Services Organisation would be required to take action to remedy the situation.

3.3.2 In response to the general perception that the Street Cleansing service could be improved the Panel considered a number of specific suggestions for improvement as follows:

(a) Introducing Community Skips

Community skips were already provided on a year-round basis, for projects such as the clearance of common ground, and had proved successful. Neighbourhood skips had been tried as an initiative but had proved costly and caused considerable operational difficulties, both as a result of the amounts and types of rubbish deposited.

(b) Mechanical Sweepers for Paths

It was noted that some paths within the District were not conducive to mechanical sweepers. However, mechanical sweepers would provide a quality sweep and were highly visible, providing evidence to the public that the Authority actively cleaned Streets.

(c) Notify Residents when Gullies are to be Cleaned

It was noted that residents could be notified when gullies were to be cleaned so that vehicles could be moved. This would also raise public awareness of the service. Officers in Environmental and Highway Services were currently working on such a proposal.

(d) Targeting Takeaway Shops

The Panel was informed that particular attention was paid to the location of Takeaway Shops due to the high level of litter problems resulting from the actions of their customers. Further work would be carried out as part of the Tidy Trader 2000 campaign.

3.3.3 The Panel recognised the difficulty in moving towards a more output-based approach to service delivery whilst at the same time ensuring a more highly visible service, which would most easily be achieved by greater frequency of cleaning.

3.3.4 The Panel noted that a trial was to be undertaken with a gang of sweepers to maintain a litter free area and also deal with other issues such as weed control and detritus in order to determine the impact of output based requirements. It was also noted that discussions would be held with manual sweepers who had commented that should their workload be increased then this would impact upon the quality of Service.

3.4 Operational Requirements

3.4.1 The Panel received a video presentation highlighting the safe working practices which needed to be adhered to with regard to the use of mechanical sweepers, van based mobile sweepers, mechanised sweepers and litter patrols. It was noted that in one year a total of 212 injuries had occurred to cleansing staff which could have been avoided with the appropriate preventative measures.

- 3.4.2 The responsibilities of Environmental Waste Services were considered by the Panel and those functions, together with those which were undertaken by other Council Services. The Panel considered the anomalies that existed within the response of the Council to problems associated with Street Cleansing. These are considered in more detail in paragraph 3.4.5 below.
- 3.4.3 The Panel appraised the Rapid Response Team which was perceived to be an extremely valuable resource and acknowledged that the Team was an exceptionally busy Service with huge demands.
- 3.4.4 The Panel considered whether the Street Cleansing should be maintained to an acceptable standard rather than aiming for perfection. Consideration was given to the need for action to be taken should standards fall below an acceptable level.
- 3.4.5 The Panel considered the cross Service views of representatives of the Leisure and Recreation Service, Highways Service, Housing Service, Environmental Waste Service and Cleansing Direct Services Organisation.

(a) Leisure and Recreation Service

The Panel was informed that areas existed where litter was impossible to control and was beyond the responsibility expected of employees to collect. The Service attempted to build in an element of time to enable staff to undertake additional duties in respect of litter collection. The Leisure and Recreation Service maintained areas of land four times a year whilst the Cleansing Direct Services Organisation provided a routine high frequency service. It was clear to the Panel that co-ordinated programmes were required between all Services. This started from the point when decisions were made at the design stage of streetscapes e.g. avoiding the planting of shrubs and the designing of shrub beds which could be unsafe or difficult to maintain, and continued through to the process of maintenance itself.

(b) Highways Service

The Panel noted the Highways Service's view that the street sweeping and gully cleaning carried out by Cleansing Services were preventative maintenance operations, central to the condition of the fabric of the district roads and pavements. Litter removal, whilst equally important, was viewed as more aesthetic in nature with its importance being one of the overall perception of the care of an area rather than causing actual damage.

The Panel was informed that over recent years the amount of actual Street Sweeping appeared to have reduced and on the manual rounds there was greater emphasis towards the picking rather than sweeping of litter. In addition, the nature of the rounds was based on frequency of visit rather than need; mechanical sweeping was also based on a routine cycle rather than prioritising known problem areas. The resulting detritus generated on pavements and highways caused an ideal location for vegetation growth. As well as being unsightly, the vegetation growth caused damage to roads and pavements whilst also causing further difficulties for road drainage systems. The Panel was informed that over the last twelve months the removal of weeds had been targeted by the Highways Service and Cleansing Direct Services Organisation and that further funding was required to achieve positive results.

With regard to the cleaning of gully heads and pipes it was noted that at present the Highways Service undertook to clear the pipe whilst Environmental Waste would clear the gully heads. Both Services had the necessary equipment to discharge both duties. The Panel considered and suggested that a nominated Service should be responsible for the total clearance of the gully heads and pipes.

(c) Housing Service

The Panel noted that public expectation was high in connection with Street Cleansing and that the quality of the Service would have an impact on the public perception of the Council. The Housing Service had responsibility for maintaining snickets and paths and recognised that the need existed to educate the public and that the provision of environmental education within Schools was important. The result of the demise of Compulsory Competitive Tendering and input based requirements allowed the Service to be more responsive in moving to output based specifications.

(d) Environmental Waste Services

The Panel was informed of the work being undertaken by Environmental Waste Services in tandem with other Services. Consideration was given by the Panel to a single supplier initiative which could be provided by Environmental Waste Services who could take on the responsibility of litter removal from defined areas to supplement the work undertaken by other Services. The Panel acknowledged that the provision of manual sweepers would provide a higher profile and address the perception problem raised by the public. Nevertheless, it was recognised that manual sweepers would be unable to be utilised in some areas e.g. main trunk roads. The Scrutiny Panel noted that ideally the service would consist of manual sweepers assisted by mechanical equipment.

(e) Cleansing Direct Services Organisation

The Service was the principle operational arm responsible for street cleansing. It was moving towards output based specifications therefore dealing with and identifying those areas which required attention within the District.

The Panel considered the issue raised that currently some unmaintained verges were dealt with on an ad hoc basis and not as part of a scheduled work programme. It was clear that a need existed to achieve co-ordinated work programmes between the Services.

3.5 Litter Prevention Campaigns

3.5.1 The Panel noted that the Council actively promoted litter prevention in a high profile campaign entitled, 'Litter Action 2000'. The Litter Action 2000 campaign sought to tackle the problems of litter within Town Centres and had been launched together with the introduction of litter action zone signs placed upon bins. Furthermore, litter bins had been sited in popular public meeting areas, whilst a series of light-hearted events were planned during 2000 including a litter mountain and road show.

3.5.2 Although the Litter Action 2000 campaign had initially concentrated on Huddersfield Town Centre the Panel was informed that the project was now looking at signage and litter bin provision within Dewsbury. Other Kirklees Town Centres would be

encouraged to join the campaign. It was acknowledged that local retailers had become involved in campaigning through the Tidy Trader 2000 competition which involved their premises frontages being monitored for lack of litter, general cleanliness and welcome appeal.

- 3.5.3 The Panel was supportive of the Litter Action 2000 campaign and its major theme, which was to tackle problems associated with chewing gum. A detailed survey of Huddersfield Town Centre had been undertaken to identify the worst affected areas. During February 2000 a specialist clean of deposited chewing gum had been undertaken in the most affected areas, followed by the introduction of chewing gum disposal bins at key locations. The launch of the chewing gum disposal bins had attracted welcome media publicity and school children, who were actively involved in litter prevention work, had provided assistance at the launch. The project had received sponsorship, promoting the partnership approach within the District. It was also noted that the Environmental Education work undertaken within Schools had been developed to complement the National Curriculum Programmes.

3.6 **Devolution Proposals**

- 3.6.1 The Panel was provided with a progress report on Devolution Proposals which could impact on the future delivery of the Street cleansing function. It was acknowledged that a Devolution Working Group had been established by the Council to pursue the devolution proposals. This could lead to a change in responsibility for the specifying of the Street Cleansing function to a more local level. The Panel acknowledged this but felt that the principles under consideration would remain the same.

4. **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The Scrutiny Executive receives the report of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel and refers it to the Environment and Transportation Scrutiny Panel, followed by the Council's Cabinet for consideration together with the conclusions of the Street Cleansing Best Value Review. The report should also be forwarded to the Environment and Transportation Management Board for information and comment.

The recommendations of the Panel are summarised as follows:

- 4.1.1 The Council's Cleansing Direct Services Organisation should be commended for its work in providing a high performance service at low cost which compared favourably with other Local Authorities.
- 4.1.2 A public perception problem existed in respect of the Street Cleansing Service. The Service should review the current deployment of manual sweepers and mechanical vehicles with a view to improving both the standard of street cleanliness but also the visibility of the Service.
- 4.1.3 The working conditions of manual workers should be reviewed and consideration be given to the following:
- (a) Provision of localised lunch and toilet facilities
 - (b) Provision of recognisable uniforms and appropriate clothing which would raise the profile of the Service

- (c) A review of the design of, and maintenance programme for, manual sweepers carts
- (d) Provision of improved and visible signage on mechanical vehicles.
- (e) Employing manual sweepers locally to their place of residence as this could raise their profile and gain greater ownership of the need to keep an area clean
- (f) Consultation and views be sought from manual workers with regard to proposed alterations to the Service.
- (g) A review of the communication methods within the Service and the ability of street cleaners to attend workplace meetings
- (h) A review of access to relevant training, particularly in the area of health and safety

4.1.4 The difficulties in dealing with litter problems should be noted and the actions of irresponsible individuals condemned. High profile Litter Prevention Campaigns should continue with a particular emphasis on those programmes provided within schools.

4.1.5 A review of the current working arrangements should be undertaken, with particular reference to the need for greater co-ordination between Council Services in both the design and maintenance of the streetscape. The report should include views on the merits of creating an operations division within a single Service to deliver the full remit of street cleansing functions. The recent restructure of the Council's senior management would result in closer links between Environmental and Highways Services - but the provision of Grounds Maintenance should also be considered. A unified service provision might also aid future moves towards greater devolution of responsibilities.

4.1.6 The principle of the Service moving to output based requirements should be supported. A more proactive system of monitoring will need to be in place in order to identify litter problem areas. The Panel suggested that Kirklees Metropolitan Council employees should be encouraged as part of a campaign to identify litter problem areas and report these via new technology methods (e-mail) to the appropriate Service.

DAG/DT Nov 2000-Jan 2001