BEST VALUE
LEARNING from INSPECTION

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Guidance for Improving Services
The Audit Commission promotes the best use of public money by ensuring the proper stewardship of public finances and by helping those responsible for public services to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

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This handbook is a companion to *Waste Management – The Strategic Challenge*, the first in the Learning from Inspection series from the Audit Commission, published in July 2001. It outlines the strategic issues affecting waste management services and details how some local authorities are tackling the current dilemmas facing service managers when developing an improvement agenda. It is intended primarily for managers of waste services and others involved in best value (BV) reviews and provides examples of strengths and weaknesses identified at inspection. It also gives help in working through the best value review (BVR) process and, most critically, in taking action to improve services.

The guidance is based primarily on evidence from the best value inspections of waste services. This evidence has been obtained by working directly alongside inspectors, analysis of reports, and meetings with local authority officers. This has been supplemented by visits to other local authorities where potential good practice may exist (including beacon councils); contacts with the Institute of Wastes Management, academics, the private sector and voluntary groups; and specialist advice from an advisory group.

Waste management has a number of strands, for example refuse collection, waste disposal, recycling, and the interaction between these activities and the different responsibilities of different types of authority mean that, in such a complex service area, there is no one uniform solution to any problem. The examples cited in this handbook are intended to present service managers and BV reviewers with information on the challenges faced by many authorities and how they have gone about addressing them while making necessary service improvements. Authorities may need to go beyond the scope of this document when considering possible solutions, but it is hoped that it provides at least a starting point.

Local authorities, and service managers in particular, have the task of reconciling the conflicting priorities of providing a good service to users while meeting central government targets and reducing costs. For example, there are the tensions between:

- service costs and the need to increase recycling;
- customer satisfaction with their traditional service and the implications of the change to more effective recycling methods;
- the local political agenda and the requirements of an integrated waste management strategy; and
- the achievement of short-term statutory targets and longer-term sustainability.

For waste services, the trade-offs between environmental concerns and cost are top of the agenda, but, under best value, there are also expectations of continuous service improvements linked to user views and needs. The best performing authorities are actively managing the compromises required to balance public opinion and the achievement of key waste targets.
Best value became a statutory duty from 1 April 2000 and the first tranche of inspections started in the late summer of 2000. Inspections and the subsequent reports have a number of purposes, including the identification and dissemination of good practice. Early inspections have shown many strengths and weaknesses in the management and quality of services provided by local authorities and in the way in which they are achieving improvements.

The findings and conclusions from individual inspections appear in publicly available reports, and these contain key messages for the inspected authority as well as for local government more widely. But they also contain examples of both good practice and weaknesses that will be of interest to those local authorities which have yet to undertake reviews.

Early analysis of inspection evidence and other fieldwork identified four key challenges as being critical to the delivery of effective waste management services and these were developed in the earlier strategic challenge paper (BOX 1).

**BOX 1 The key challenges facing waste services**

**Recycling**

Many local authorities are finding it difficult to meet the Government’s recycling targets; those that are succeeding are taking hard decisions about how to improve their traditional services.

**Waste minimisation**

Recycling waste is only part of the story; efforts to reduce the amount of waste generated are equally, if not more, important.

**Long- and short-term trade-offs**

Authorities have to meet short-term statutory targets while recognising the need to develop and deliver longer-term, sustainable waste management policies.

**Partnerships to tackle the whole waste stream**

Closer partnership working between waste collection and waste disposal authorities, and with other key stakeholders including the private sector, is the key to delivering both statutory targets and sustainable waste management.


This handbook follows a similar structure to that of the strategic challenge paper. The main sections follow a common structure, outlining the challenges and the potential barriers to meeting them and the actions being taken to overcome these barriers in the more successful authorities. It discusses the dilemmas facing service managers and provides practical examples of how a range of authorities (mainly those already inspected) have gone about addressing them. The examples are drawn from three main sources:

- Best value inspection reports – direct quotes from the published document;
- Audit Commission fieldwork – short visits to local authorities, primarily in tandem with an inspection team; and
- Audit Commission research – desk-based research including contacts with other local authorities and organisations.
These are then linked to the practical matter of undertaking a BV review of waste services and the development of an improvement plan. A checklist containing some of the questions local authorities will need to ask when reviewing waste services supports each section. There is also a short section which covers some specific operational issues.

The guidance is also available on the Audit Commission’s website in PDF form and, given the size of the document and relevance for different authority types, it has been designed to be accessible through a search based on keywords and links.
1. Waste management is one of the most visible frontline services that local government provides. Opinion surveys suggest that residents think refuse collection is the most important service provided by local government. Many users have a positive view of their waste services, especially refuse collection, and councils consistently achieve high satisfaction ratings. Poor waste services can lead to residents seeing their area as run-down and dirty, and unattractive to potential businesses and other employers.

2. Under best value, there are expectations of continuous service improvements linked to user views and needs. But a ‘good’ service is not simply one that has high immediate satisfaction scores or that succeeds at the traditional task of collecting refuse. Wider environmental concerns take local authority waste management responsibilities much further. Indeed, sustainable development underpins central government’s approach to waste management. Over recent years central government has been developing an approach to waste management, culminating in Waste Strategy 2000 produced in May 2000 (ref. 1). This outlines its current vision and policies in relation to waste and its expectations for local government.

3. In 1999/2000 England and Wales produced 29.3 million tonnes of municipal waste at an overall cost for collection and disposal of around £1.5 billion – 81 per cent of this was landfilled. Central government considers this position to be incompatible with a sustainable economy and therefore aims to treat waste increasingly as a resource. The challenge is to reduce the need for waste disposal: the top priority being waste reduction, then re-use, and recovery/recycling, with the least desirable option being disposal.

4. The establishment in 1996 of an incremental Landfill Tax, the 1999 EC Landfill Directive, which sets ambitious targets for reducing biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill, and other EC environmental legislation covering waste incineration and packaging, have made waste services an immediate concern for authorities (ref. 2). The costs and pressures of finding alternative means of disposal and landfill sites strengthen the need to minimise waste, to recycle as much as possible and to find other uses for what remains. Waste management has therefore rapidly become an area where a more proactive approach to efficiency and effectiveness is required, along with a willingness to explore more radical solutions to pressing problems.

5. In 1997 the Audit Commission published It’s A Small World – Local Government’s Role as a Steward of the Environment and Waste Matters – Good Practice in Waste Management which highlighted the progress of English and Welsh authorities on environmental issues and flagged up areas for future improvement (ref. 3 and 4). In 1999 a follow-up report from the Commission noted ‘more household waste being recycled, up from 39 to 59 tonnes per 1,000 households’, but, overall, the total household waste being generated ‘has increased

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1 Municipal waste is waste that is collected by, or on behalf of, local authorities. For 1999/2000 this comprised 26.25 million tonnes of household waste and 3.09 million tonnes from non-household sources.
from 802 to 883 tonnes per 1,000 households’ (ref. 5). Thus improvements in recycling were undermined by greater growth in the volume of waste generated.

EXPECTATIONS

6. The Government, in **Waste Strategy 2000**, takes the view that ‘the primary objective must be to make much greater efforts to reduce the amount of waste that we generate, but we must also substantially increase the recycling, composting and recovery of energy from the waste that we do produce’. The range of targets in **Waste Strategy 2000** and the EC Landfill Directive emphasises the importance of effective waste management. This section outlines these wide-ranging expectations and the consequent dilemmas facing local authorities in managing and improving waste services.

7. **Waste Strategy 2000** underlines the importance of moving to a fully integrated waste management system, based on active partnerships between local authorities. In March 2001 DETR produced, for England, guidance on the Municipal Waste Management (MWM) Strategy which is seen as the framework for these partnerships (ref. 6). The MWM Strategy sets a strategic framework for the management of municipal waste, jointly developed and subscribed to by both the waste collection authorities and the waste disposal authority for the area. There is as yet no statutory duty on producing such a strategy, but it is the Government’s intention to make them mandatory.

8. In Wales the Strategy will be taken forward by the Waste Policy Support Unit, funded by the National Assembly, with a remit that includes:
   - developing the Waste Strategy for Wales – the consultation paper *Managing Waste Sustainability* July 2001, will help the Assembly to develop and agree a strategy by early 2002 (ref. 7);
   - advising on the implementation of the EC Landfill Directive in Wales; and
   - advising on the development of appropriate planning guidance for waste management in Wales.

9. The Government has made clear its expectations of waste collection and waste disposal authorities (BOX 2) and has set a series of targets and goals for waste (BOXES 3 and 4).

**BOX 2  Central government’s expectations**

Waste collection and waste disposal authorities are expected to:

- develop effective working relationships to deliver comprehensive Municipal Waste Management Strategies, taking account of the Waste Strategy and containing clear objectives and timescales for action;
- put in place effective local arrangements to reduce waste and maximise recycling, composting and recovery of value;
- raise awareness locally of the costs of dealing with waste and the part that individuals can play in reducing the amount of waste;
- involve local people in decisions on waste, and work with community-based schemes to promote re-use and recycling; and
- form consortia where these are able to conclude better arrangements with reprocessors and other outlets for recyclates, in terms of guaranteed tonnages, minimum prices and/or length of contract.

*Source: Waste Strategy 2000*
Key targets and goals to ensure that the necessary step-change in waste management delivers the Government’s vision and the requirements of the EC Landfill Directive are:

- to meet existing targets of 40 per cent of municipal waste to be recovered and 25 per cent of household waste to be recycled or composted as soon as possible. The Government aims to achieve this by 2005;
- to recover value from 45 per cent of municipal waste by 2010, including recycling or composting 30 per cent of household waste by the same date; and
- to recover two-thirds of our municipal waste by 2015, at least one-half of which should be through recycling and composting.


The Government has set statutory performance standards for each waste collection authority and waste disposal authority. These have been set at a level to ensure that each authority contributes proportionately to the achievement of the national target in Waste Strategy 2000. The Government will monitor performance carefully and will intervene in certain circumstances to ensure that authorities are on track to achieve these targets.

Source: Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies

10. From the perspective of most local authorities inspected to date, these targets and standards represent an ambitious agenda and timetable that many are struggling to achieve. Recycling performance shows that, on the whole, recycling rates are increasing, but at the current rate of progress many waste collection authorities are unlikely to meet the 2005 recycling target.

DILEMMAS

11. The best value requirement to carry out fundamental service reviews has given local authorities an impetus to think about how they will need to change services to accommodate these specific central government expectations in terms of the quality of the environment and sustainable development. The range of legislation and guidance demonstrates the past and current pressures on local authority waste services. But over and above these, there are the requirements for continuous improvement in services for individual users, both in terms of quality and cost.

12. Maximising outcomes to service users is a fundamental part of both BV reviews and BV inspections. This holds true for all services but particularly in the area of waste management. Many people perceive refuse collection as the most important service provided by local government, while the cleanliness of streets and the local environment also commonly feature as major concerns.

In England, in July 2000, DETR produced detailed guidance, Waste Strategy Guidance - Best Value and Waste Management (ref. 8). This makes clear that a crucial element of the Government’s approach to sustainable development is to ‘tackle our growing mountain of waste’ and that best value is key to making a reality of the vision outlined in Waste Strategy 2000. The Strategy includes the statement that ‘all local authorities should have regard to the Strategy and its goals and objectives in planning their waste management services within the best value framework.’
13. The BV review, using the ‘4Cs’, is the means by which authorities can analyse and develop solutions to these demanding challenges. For example, questioning traditional service delivery, comparing with better performing authorities, exploring the market for investment and new services, and identifying user needs and expectations. The review is unlikely to provide easy answers, but should clarify options and provide a clear framework for the development of a practical and deliverable improvement plan.

14. The potential barriers to meeting the various key challenges and the actions being taken in the more successful authorities to overcome them are described and illustrated in the next four sections. These are followed by a short section covering a number of specific service delivery issues, and a final section which discusses some of the practical issues relating to BV reviews in waste and the development of improvement plans.
15. Waste Strategy 2000 sets clear targets on the proportion of waste that authorities should recycle or compost:
   - at least 25 per cent of household waste by 2005;
   - at least 30 per cent of household waste by 2010; and
   - at least 33 per cent of household waste by 2015.

But many local authorities are finding it difficult to meet these targets, while those that are succeeding are taking serious decisions about how to improve their traditional services.

16. To ensure that all authorities contribute to achieving these targets, the Government has set statutory performance standards for recycling and composting in England. Taking performance from the 1998/99 baseline data, these standards equate for many local authorities to doubling their 1998/99 recycling rate by 2003/04 (EXHIBIT 1). Authorities that fail to meet these targets, may be subject to intervention by the Secretary of State under Section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999. The Government has intimated that it may establish combined waste management authorities where targets are not achieved or there is no improvement in service delivery.

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EXHIBIT 1 DETR’s recycling and composting performance standards

Many local authorities will need to improve their recycling rates significantly to meet the standards for 2003/04 and 2005/06

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Source: DETR, Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies
17. But these targets should be achieved in conjunction with waste minimisation (see Section 2). Increasing recycling rates when the volume of waste is growing even faster will not solve the problem. As the volume of waste generated nationally is growing annually at 3 per cent, most authorities face a widening gap between the volume of waste that needs to be recycled, and their capacity to recycle it.

18. Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 1999/2000 show that, while ten authorities were already performing well above the overall national target of 25 per cent for recycling by 2005, most were below 10 per cent (EXHIBIT 2). Nearly one-half of English waste collection authorities already provide kerbside collection of recyclable materials, in addition to the main domestic collection. But a number are still relying solely on civic amenity and bring sites for recycling, which restricts those who do not have access to a car. Many authorities still need to change their approach to recycling in order to achieve the national standards.

EXHIBIT 2 Recycling rates 1999/2000 (all authorities)
The majority of authorities are struggling to meet a recycling rate of 10 per cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of authorities</th>
<th>Government targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household waste recycled (%)</td>
<td>25% by 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Audit Commission Performance Indicators, 1999/2000

19. To meet the 2003/04 recycling targets authorities will almost certainly need to put in place kerbside collection of recyclables. The evidence is that this can have a positive impact on recycling rates, but there may be significant initial costs. Analyses of the top 25 per cent of district councils for recycling in 1999/2000 showed that over 90 per cent have some type of kerbside collection of recyclables in place. In addition, all those authorities that have improved their recycling rates by over 20 per cent since 1993/94 have schemes for the kerbside collection of recyclables.

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*Source: Audit Commission Performance Indicators, 1999/2000*

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II Collection only and collection and disposal authorities – does not include county councils and joint waste disposal authorities.
20. All local authorities are aware of what they must do about improving recycling, but there are a range of factors that can prevent this becoming a reality. Some are certainly valid while others may provide a convenient excuse for inaction. This section flags up some of these barriers and gives details of the practical steps some local authorities have taken to address them. To overcome the various barriers, both real and perceived, a range of actions are required that will lead to improved services and to the achievement of targets. There is no easy fit between the barriers that hinder improvements in recycling and the actions that local authorities will need to take – one barrier does not equal one action. But local authorities will need to explore all possibilities.

COST CONSTRAINTS

21. Service managers face conflicting pressures and these are reflected in the performance indicators for waste management. An analysis of refuse collection and recycling costs highlights the contradictory pressures on authorities. Costs of refuse collection for district councils appear to increase as recycling increases, yet the Government requires costs to move to that of the lower quartile, while improving recycling rates. In parallel, the recycling rate will need to increase, while customer satisfaction must be both acceptably high and improving. Better recycling schemes with, possibly, kerbside collection and improved facilities and information, generally mean increased costs. And changes to existing services may also impact adversely on currently high public satisfaction ratings.

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1 The figures do not reflect recycling credits.
22. The collection of recyclables is particularly expensive for rural district councils. Such councils sometimes favour bring sites in outlying areas as the main conduit for recyclables, although villages are often unwilling to have a bring site. Inspections have also shown that bring sites are often not cleared and cleaned regularly, adding to litter hotspots and fly tipping and generating local dissatisfaction. Local authorities will need to ensure that these tensions are addressed in the BV review.

DIVERTED RECYCLING CREDITS

23. Recycling credits are paid to collection authorities by disposal authorities for the tonnages of waste the collection authority has diverted from the disposal stream through recycling. Recycling credits reflect the savings that disposal authorities make from not having to dispose of the waste, and, where disposal is by landfill, a reduced level of landfill tax. But recycling credits are not ring-fenced and there is evidence to show that some collection authorities are using them to resource other service priorities rather than for initiatives for the development of waste services and recycling in particular.

VARIABLE MARKETS FOR RECYCLABLES

24. In seeking to meet their recycling targets, local authorities are increasing the amount of recyclables available on the market. Existing UK markets for recyclables are currently unable to take the amount of waste that the recycling and diversion targets will generate. The existence of a buyer for these materials is essential to ensure sustainability. Inspections highlighted evidence of fluctuating markets and the cost to authorities of being unable to sell their recyclables. For example, in June 2000, white office paper fetched £50 per tonne, but only £17.50 per tonne in May 2001. It is difficult for authorities to budget effectively with such fluctuations in price. The setting of statutory recycling targets itself has an adverse effect on the market: waste processing companies know that there will be an increase in the volume of recyclables and therefore are less inclined to offer higher prices to attract more recyclable material.

LIMITED DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

25. There is a wide range of initiatives in the area of waste management. But, in spite of approaches such as that of beacon councils, there does not appear to be any systematic means for allowing authorities to learn from one another. Inspections have shown that while many authorities are establishing separate pilot initiatives aimed at increasing their recycling capacity, the dissemination of experiences is, at best, mixed. Instead of learning from successful schemes at other authorities, individual officers continue to pilot the same initiatives in their own authorities.

NEGATIVE USER PERCEPTIONS

26. The performance indicator measuring the satisfaction of customers with services has increased awareness among elected members of its importance and, perhaps, their

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I Data supplied by the Clean Merseyside Centre, Liverpool

II The recent establishment of the Best Value Waste Network is an attempt to spread more widely local authority experiences in all areas of improving waste services.
willingness to make changes to services with high satisfaction levels. Similarly, residents do not necessarily want changes in service delivery that they view positively. Residents have high expectations of their weekly domestic refuse collection. Most local authorities recognise this, focusing on regularity and reliability that is reflected in the consequent high satisfaction ratings for this service in many user surveys. Changes to collection times and methods will impact, at least initially, on user satisfaction levels, as well as the performance indicator and members’ political aspirations.

**LACK OF FACILITIES AT CIVIC AMENITY SITES**

27. Inspection reality checks have shown that lack of provision of recycling facilities at civic amenity sites is not uncommon. This also ignores its potential as a source of information and education for users about the costs and consequences of waste disposal and approaches to recycling and waste minimisation.

**ACTION TO OVERCOME BARRIERS – RECYCLING**

28. Recycling rates have not increased significantly for the majority of authorities over the last few years. Most authorities have improved their recycling rates by 2–8 per cent since 1993/94, although for some, recycling rates have actually decreased. However, other local authorities have improved their recycling rate by 20 per cent or more (EXHIBIT 3) and it is the experiences from these that should inform others as they seek to achieve the prescribed standards for recycling.

**EXHIBIT 3**  

Most authorities have improved their recycling rates since 1993/94

![Chart showing recycling performance](chart.png)


I Where comparison data is available
EXPLORING NEW MARKETS FOR RECYCLABLES

29. As part of the taking forward of recycling initiatives, local authorities will need to ensure that there are markets for the recyclable waste and that these are sustainable. The range of potentially recyclable materials is extensive, but many local authorities are only now moving beyond the main staples of paper, bottles and cans. Few authorities currently recycle plastic, although plastics take up most space in landfill sites. This is primarily due to there being fewer markets for recycled plastics.

30. Before new recycling initiatives identified in BV reviews are developed, authorities should first establish where the markets are and what products interest them. And there are an increasing number of sources that authorities can turn to for guidance. Recycling initiatives must provide recyclables of the type and quality required by the market. One initiative identified at inspection was the Clean Merseyside Centre (CMC) Project (BOX 5).

BOX 5  Clean Merseyside Centre Project

The Clean Merseyside Centre (CMC) Project is funded through Landfill Tax Credits, European Regional Development Funds, Merseyside Joint Waste Disposal Authority, and also matched funding from the five waste collection authorities on Merseyside. The CMC has been running for a year, and encourages existing organisations to develop new products and services using or producing recycled materials, thereby increasing the recycling of waste in Merseyside.

The project is managed by Enviros on behalf of the project sponsors and funders. Project officers have examined each authority’s waste management strategy, and have provided a market development plan for Merseyside. They have also performed a waste trend analysis on waste from the districts projected up to 2015. CMC then finds markets for the increase in material, in addition to creating and safeguarding jobs in waste processing and manufacturing.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

31. More broadly, local authorities should ensure that procurement policies and sustainability policies promote the use of recycled materials, both internally and externally. The BV review should, therefore, include some wider reflection on the markets for recyclables and the implications for other council departments in adopting a proactive approach to the use of recyclables.

KERBSIDE COLLECTION

32. The most common way in which local authorities have gone about promoting and implementing more recycling has been to encourage the use of local bring and civic amenity sites, although this has not been universal. ‘For many years, such ‘banks’ or ‘bring sites’ have been the main method of collection of recyclables. While these sites have been reasonably successful, they suffer from many limitations: they require collection, sorting and a journey for the householder, the banks themselves often become full or soiled and this acts as a disincentive to further efforts to recycle’ (ref. 9).

I See, for example, Ipswich Borough Council website www.ipswich.gov.uk/services/recycle/a-z.htm for a list of what can be recycled.

II At the end of 2000, the Government set up an independent body, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to remove barriers to waste minimisation, re-use and recycling, and to promote stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products. WRAP also has an advisory, support and guidance role, including assistance to local authorities that are struggling to find markets for their recyclables.
33. Without undermining the importance of the use of bring sites in improving recycling, it is the move to some form of kerbside collection that appears to have the most significant impact. ‘… this means that kerbside collections of recyclable materials are required. Mr Meacher stated that the statutory recycling targets would not be met without such collections. Kerbside collections are much more convenient for householders than taking separated materials for recycling to ‘banks’ around the locality.’ (ref. 9) The majority of recyclables collected comprise paper and card but there are others (EXHIBIT 4).

EXHIBIT 4  Amounts of different materials from household sources collected for recycling in 1999/2000

Paper remains the main recycled material.

34. There are a number of approaches to the collection of recyclables. There are almost certainly additional costs, but this need not be prohibitive. Setting up a kerbside recycling scheme does not necessarily require local authorities to change to a wheeled bin system with the inevitable additional costs of introducing a new method of collection. For example, New Forest District Council uses a plastic sack system where recyclables are presented in a separate clear sack. This enables the operative to ensure the recyclables have not been contaminated with general refuse.

35. Some authorities with ‘dirty’ material recycling facilities (MRFs) use a survival bag system where recyclables are collected in a distinctive coloured sack along with the normal refuse collection. At the MRF, the sacks are separated from the usual black sacks, however, contamination is often high. This can be a handicap in a market which demands high
quality recyclates. This approach is also not conducive to educating the public to the wider issues over waste minimisation and recycling compared with one where users are informed about the potential recyclability of different materials and the benefits of separation at source.

36. There are a number of approaches to the kerbside collection of recyclables which local authorities are currently operating, either limiting collections to designated areas or neighbourhoods and or specific materials, both of which may be expanded as experience increases (BOXES 6 and 7).

BOX 6  Birmingham City Council

‘The Council operates a kerbside paper collection service – called Paper Chase – for around 67,000 households (20 per cent) in various parts of the city. About 10-15 per cent (around 7,000) of these households participate in the scheme giving on average 42 kgs per year, in other councils this can be as much as 81 kgs. The service is not provided on an equal basis to all residents in the city. There are two reasons for this – the service originally started in [one area] and the Council took over a private collection service that failed in 1996.

The Council sees the introduction of kerbside recycling as the only way the statutory recycling targets can be met. It has now signed a Public Service Agreement (PSA) under which it will receive £2.5 million borrowing approval over three years as an incentive to introduce such a scheme for significantly improving the service and the amount of waste recycled. This money can be spent on new equipment but the Council needs to fund the revenue cost of the staff to operate it. The Council has yet to identify the revenue costs or exactly how a kerbside-recycling scheme would operate and integrate with the normal refuse collection system.’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 7  London Borough of Brent

‘The green box recycling scheme currently covers 73,000 households in the borough. The StreetCare service has also increased the publicity surrounding this scheme working jointly with Ealing Community Transport. A newsletter is produced jointly on a quarterly basis and outlines collection dates together with the standards users can expect from the service. The website is also used to give information on the service to users. The Council has started to monitor complaints of non-collection of green boxes, 734 complaints were received between July and September 2000. Customer views included boxes not replaced correctly, low awareness of the Recycling Newsletter, and a lack of facilities for recycling at flats. Customers who do recycle wanted to recycle a wider range of materials.

Materials not collected were returned to the resident. Plastic bags were removed prior to sorting, and the sorting of materials appeared to work well. The borough-wide recycling rate is currently estimated at 6.5 per cent including materials collected through local bring banks (and has increased from 4.4 per cent in 1998/99). This increase is attributable to the expansion of the kerbside green box recycling scheme. The kerbside collection scheme will be extended to a further 2,000 households during 2001. This will mean that 75 per cent of the borough (75,000 households) will have a kerbside collection service. Given that 73 per cent of the borough now has a kerbside collection service for recyclables, resident participation in the scheme needs to increase if the higher recycling targets for the borough are to be achieved.’

Source: Best value inspection report
REDUCING RECYCLING COSTS

37. One way to reduce the cost of recycling is the collection of recyclables and non-recyclables on alternate weeks. Few local authorities have adopted alternate week collections to date, but BV reviews will need to explore both the potential for savings and the impact on perceptions of service quality in following such a policy. One metropolitan borough council has estimated that moving to alternate collections will save the authority £750,000 per annum and help to achieve a 23 per cent recycling rate.

38. But such a change has proved to be a major challenge. Eastleigh Borough Council has alternate weekly collections and the second highest recycling rate in England, 1999/2000 (32 per cent). However, Eastleigh was not successful in its bid for beacon status as ‘despite the overall strong performance, the Panel gained the strong impression that the council had employed a series of ‘top down’ initiatives. These have delivered results, but the evidence of community participation did not appear as strong as in other shortlisted candidates’ (ref. 10). At least two more Hampshire authorities are looking to implement alternate weekly collections.

39. The retention of non-recyclable domestic refuse for two weeks between collections has often not proved popular and local authorities pursuing this option have had to be particularly proactive in selling to its residents such a fundamental change in a priority service. One officer stated that ‘user satisfaction is going to depend on the council’s marketing skills, to maintain our performance level’. This authority is using a marketing graduate within the waste service to assist the changeover. The limited evidence available suggests that successful alternate collection systems require ongoing support and education by the authority.

40. Authorities therefore need to make the decision to move some of the responsibility for recycling and waste minimisation on to the public as part of the effort to achieve higher recycling rates. Eastleigh Borough Council (BOX 8), and Daventry Borough Council (BOX 9) have moved in this direction. One unitary authority, however, is now questioning the policy of alternate weekly collections in the light of user dissatisfaction (BOX 10).
Prior to moving to their present system of refuse collection in April 1996, Eastleigh used the black sack back door collection. Clear sacks were introduced in a one-year pilot for dry recyclables that went to a MRF, on alternate weekly collections. The decision was taken to expand the pilot as most residents were happy with the scheme, and to take the opportunity to change to a wheeled bin system for all 6,500 properties in the trial area.

The political will in Eastleigh was to proceed with the scheme, and officers took time to talk to residents, to ensure that people understood the need for such collections and their role in ensuring that such collection of recyclables was effective, and also to provide people with the most practical sized bins. Publicised roadshows were also held. It took from April 1996 to November 1998 to put the system in place.

The standard issue is two 140-litre wheeled bins, grey for normal refuse, green for dry recyclables (paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, food and drinks cans). Three or more residents in a property can have a 240-litre bin. Flats and terraces unable to house bins were informed that they may have difficulty with wheeled bins and have carried on with the black and clear sack alternate collection system.

Residents now have to sort their waste. If they do not sort their recyclables and contaminate the bin, they have to wait for their next appropriate collection for their refuse to be removed by the authority. Operatives tick a checklist to inform the resident what the contamination is, and the collectors will pick up once the bin is decontaminated. However, if the resident does this more than once, they will be charged for the next special collection.

Seminars were held in-house for officers, members and operatives to explain the need for the scheme, what happens on the ground and also what operatives have to do in terms of checking bins for contamination. The number of rounds have increased from four to seven rounds with an increased number of vehicles. The same vehicles are used each week but steam-cleaned, and outer signs changed, as appropriate for recyclable or residual waste collection.

Source: Audit Commission research

Daventry successfully introduced an alternate weekly collection system, with assistance from Waste Watch\(^1\) to deliver an extensive public communication and education programme to support the trial: ‘Waste Watch’s role was to provide support and information to householders in the trial area, to encourage participation and keep contamination to the minimum. Householders often needed time and encouragement to help them understand the importance of recycling waste’ \(\text{(ref. 11)}\).

Daventry had a recycling rate of 35 per cent in 1999/2000\(^2\). By September 1999, the alternate weekly collection system had been introduced to all 30,000 households in the district. They now receive an organic waste collection service on alternate weeks to the existing refuse collection service, as well as weekly collection of their dry recyclables. The refuse is collected in a standard 240-litre grey wheeled bin; two recycling boxes are provided for the dry recyclables. A 240-litre brown wheeled bin is provided for the collection of kitchen and garden organics, and cardboard, all of which is composted. A kitchen pre-sort bin is also provided with the brown bins to encourage the separation of kitchen of the kitchen organics. The grey and brown bins are collected on alternate weeks, with the red and blue box collections on a weekly basis.

Collection crews monitor the contents of the brown bin. Any contaminated bins are left and a sticker is attached advising the resident to contact the telephone hotline for further advice. The Council have a policy of not collecting any side waste. Larger grey bins are available for families of five or more on application.

Source: Audit Commission research

\(^{1}\) Waste Watch is a national charity, supported by DETR, that works in partnership with local community groups, authorities and industry to educate, inform and raise awareness on waste reduction, re-use and recycling.

In 1993, ... piloted alternate weekly collections, with organic waste, using a brown bin scheme for 6,000 properties (5 rounds), covering a mix of terraces, semi-detached houses, council and private estates. Previously, residents had a 240 litre bin, which was collected weekly.

The Council (now part of the unitary authority) surveyed residents, those in the scheme and those not, detailing the need to meet targets and seeking views on which scheme to use. Support was given for kerbside collection of recyclables but concern was expressed over alternate collections (from those who had been using it for 8 years). It was seen as difficult for large families, and the views generally supported the reintroduction of weekly waste collection.

The scheme contributed significantly to a reduction in the amount of waste produced. The area historically had a high level of waste generation and above average organic content (72 per cent), plus widespread civic amenity sites. The Council felt that they could not ignore the views of people who had experienced the scheme. It is felt that the socio-economic characteristics of the area had a major influence on the quality of the recyclables; in some areas recycling is not a priority.

The quality of the recyclate was often poor as some residents would hide waste under the organic to avoid taking it to the civic amenity site.

The Council is therefore looking to end the alternate collection twin bin scheme for organics. To reach the 24 per cent recycling target for 2005 and to improve the quality of recyclate, positive public participation is required. Therefore they will also need more resources from a budget where education and social services are often the priority areas.

The Council composts organic waste (1300 tonnes material collected per annum) and has a guaranteed market for paper collected kerbside (32,000 households, but only a 32 per cent participation rate), through Cheshire Recycling. Glass is collected from bring sites by Glass Recycling UK and taken to a reprocessor. Cans, metal, aluminium, wood and cardboard all have local markets. The authority struggles with plastics, but feels it has to provide an outlet for bulky plastics for residents with alternate collections.

Source: Audit Commission research

41. The best opportunity for the introduction of alternate weekly collections may be in parallel with a wheeled bin system. The public inevitably compares services with those of other, normally neighbouring, authorities. There will remain issues about the capacity for storage and authorities will need to consider the impact of any such scheme on all property types and recognise that there will be areas where such an approach is not practical and alternative arrangements will need to be put in place. One local authority officer view was clear: ‘make alternate collections mandatory and then it will work’.

42. One district council spends around £170,000 per year providing black sacks and a ‘clear all’ policy, but the recycling rate is low. Members here face the decision whether it is cost-effective to provide a limitless supply of bags, or whether revenue savings could be made to free resources for improvements to encourage recycling.

43. A further approach to reduce recycling costs is to develop partnerships with neighbouring authorities, to benefit from economies of scale. Waste management, including recycling, cannot be considered just within the boundaries of one local authority. Neighbouring authorities face similar problems and dilemmas, while there are many private and public sector organisations, including voluntary groups, with an active interest and involvement in change and better recycling. In terms of recycling, there are a number of initiatives and experiences that can inform others who have yet to undertake a review. The Peterborough
Cell Project comprises several waste collection authorities who have arranged to take materials collected by their recycling schemes to Peterborough City Council's MRF (BOXES 11 and 12).

**BOX 11 Peterborough Recycling Cell Project**

The Peterborough Cell Project is a partnership between authorities from four different waste disposal authority areas (Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council, South Holland District Council, and Wellingborough Borough Council), the private sector (Shanks and Valpack) and funding body EB Cambridgeshire, to increase municipal waste recycling. The Cell works around Peterborough’s MRF and delivers recycling services to around 600,000 households throughout the region.

The project identifies the benefits of the partnership in terms of developing regional approaches to waste management. Funding for the project has come from landfill tax, Valpack and revenue from the local authorities. Research is also being carried out on ascertaining the impact of the Cell, how it is achieving higher recycling rates, and examining ways in which the Cell approach may be expanded. The authority has also formed strong working relationships with COMPASS, an organisation whose projects are aimed at increasing the general well being of society. It receives resources from the local authority in terms of revenue and officer and member time under such recycling initiatives as RESTORE\(^\text{I}\), SOFA\(^\text{II}\), RE-PAINT\(^\text{III}\), and RESTORE-IT\(^\text{IV}\).

*Source: Audit Commission research*

**BOX 12 Project Integra**

Project Integra (Hampshire County Council and its constituent district and unitary authorities) has eliminated the potential divisiveness of recycling credits, as the county retains the credits for use on the recycling infrastructure, such as maintaining civic amenity sites. In return for ‘giving up’ their entitlement to recycling credits the district councils and unitaries have full access to the county's recycling facilities.

*Source: Audit Commission research*

44. A number of authorities work with voluntary groups to provide recycling schemes. Recycling credits have been used by a number of councils to involve local communities and community groups in recycling initiatives, either covering their costs or paying voluntary organisations or community groups to assist in the delivery of recycling (BOX 13).

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**I** RESTORE collects unwanted materials from local businesses and makes them available to schools and local groups for use in art and craft projects.

**II** SOFA recovers unwanted furniture and redistributes it to local residents on welfare benefit, thereby reducing the waste stream and providing support to those in need.

**III** RE-PAINT recovers unwanted paint, that would otherwise find its way into the waste stream and puts it back into use in the community.

**IV** RESTORE-IT performs a similar function to the above, but with unwanted computer equipment.
BOX 13  Birmingham City Council

[The Council has worked] with the Groundwork Trust and other organisations to set up community-based recycling schemes and is trying to persuade local community groups to adopt a bring site to keep clean. The … Council does not have a formal agreement with its recycling partners to providing the recycling service – for which it is still responsible. Partners are not effectively monitored to ensure the bring sites are kept clean or regularly emptied. We spoke to the recycling partners who were happy to be monitored in such a way and suggested a number of other service improvements.

Many of the recycling schemes operated by the voluntary sector are paid for by short-term grants and are vulnerable to changes in the price paid for recycled materials. The Council has yet to develop a strategy to ensure that the service continues despite changes in funding or market conditions.

Source: Best value inspection report

45. The converse to this was the subject of comment at inspection at a district council, an authority with a high recycling rate, but which was attributed, at least in part, to the incidence of recycling credits (BOX 14).

BOX 14  District Council

The need substantially to increase recycling levels links to issues around the Council's long-term ability to maintain its current success. Much of the Council's effort is funded from its high level of recycling credit receipts from the County Council. The district receives about one-third of the total credits paid by the County Council to the seven district/borough councils, a "disproportionately high level of credit …" reflecting the "good luck" of the presence of municipal waste transfer facilities in the district. … The County Council has tried to agree with the districts/boroughs collectively a standardised county-wide approach which in effect would prevent this "accidental subsidy", and transfer some of the credit … to help the development of a county-wide integrated recycling programme. However, the district is very reluctant to agree to any change to it. This therefore hampers the extent and rate of development of integrated county-wide waste recycling [and wider waste management] services'. ‘Whilst the Council’s position is understandable for short-term financial reasons, it may be unsustainable longer-term. This poses significant issues around future recycling achievement. Including recycling in the review, coupled with effective challenge, would have identified the significance of this issue and opened up thinking about the way in which the refuse collection contract could have solved the problem. The issue still needs to be addressed.’

Source: Best value inspection report
CIVIC AMENITY AND BRING SITES

46. Civic amenity and local bring sites have a key role in improving levels of recycling and inspectors have made critical comment on the user-friendliness of some sites covering aspects such as signage and access as well as cleanliness and clarity about what is available. Users are likely to be put off by substandard facilities whereas a positive impression can help both levels of recycling and separation of materials to minimise costs. Providing comprehensive recycling facilities particularly at civic amenity sites is essential (BOXES 15 and 16).

**BOX 15 Leeds City Council**

Leeds has recycling provision for wood, textiles, glass, paper, plastics, oil and white goods at their civic amenity sites as well as normal disposal facilities. Leeds used a dirty MRF where staff sorted the recyclables. Moving to source separation has enabled operatives to move, from sorting waste in the MRF, to support at household waste recycling sites assisting the public with recycling and other waste matters.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

**BOX 16 Birmingham City Council**

‘The Council collects a wide range of household waste for recycling. Residents can recycle paper, glass, textiles and cans at bring sites – although the full range is limited to a small number of sites. The five civic amenity sites also take and recycle green garden waste, oil, batteries, metals and building materials.

The service needs to be accessible to encourage people to use it. There are over 400 bring sites within the city operated by the Council and other recycling organisations. 97 per cent of residents have a local bring site within 1km of their home. Residents are generally happy with the location of bring sites (but they are often dirty which residents don’t like and the Council intends to improve this aspect with additional monies allocated). There is a preference for the off-street sites (on supermarket car parks and shopping centres) to those on street corners. An examination of the distribution of these sites found that in some wards there were three times as many bring sites per head of population than in others.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

47. There are a number of user focus issues that local authorities will need to consider in reviewing the provision of civic amenity and bring sites. The description ‘civic amenity site’ may not be user-friendly and many local authorities, for example Leeds, as well as piloting a major redevelopment of a site to provide more accessible recycling facilities, has already adopted names such as ‘household waste recycling centres’ to ensure that its function and facilities are clear to all. Changing the name to one that promotes recycling assists in educating the public to recycle waste at such centres, and also contributes to a culture of recycling as opposed to ‘tipping’. In particular county councils will need to work with their districts to ensure that civic amenity site provision complements local household collection arrangements and other services (for example, bulky collections) to ensure an effective and joined-up approach.

48. Mobile civic amenity sites are sometimes provided in areas where there are no permanent sites. Inspectors reviewing waste management at one borough council received positive views of the service from some parish councils, but identified variable patterns of usage
around the area and recommended further consideration as to its future deployment. One county council provides a weekly freighter in two towns, and large villages are visited monthly. Residents can dispose of anything in the freighters. Mobile sites are very popular, however one officer remarked that ‘this is causing mayhem with a great deal of trade waste abuse and green waste thrown in’. The county is now considering withdrawing the service as fly tipping is common in the areas where the mobile service picks up waste. Residents will not always wait for the vehicle to arrive and instead flytip their waste.

49. A major issue now arising concerning civic amenity sites and which needs to be reflected in any BV review is the overall level of provision and accessibility, usage by non-residents and the potential to make charges for such services. A number of authorities have started issuing permits for residents. Many have put in place height restrictions at their sites to prevent access by vans, and some have started to reduce opening hours particularly at ‘peak usage times’, weekends and Mondays. Clearly the impact of such decisions will be influenced by the location of sites and alternatives, but consequent on such changes will be some impact on volumes of waste generated and recycling levels. When Rutland changed policy to allow only their residents to use their sites, waste arisings reduced.

50. Local authorities face difficult decisions when seeking to reduce the level of waste generated and costs of disposal by charging for access; sometimes for non-residents only, sometimes for residents also. This can impact on neighbouring authorities in cost and performance terms (more waste generated and to be disposed of) and users, especially if their nearest site is in another local authority area, may resort to fly tipping. In fact, there is already some evidence that charging increases the amount of waste brought for disposal in the sites of neighbouring authorities where no restrictions or charges are in place. The full impact of such decisions is not yet apparent, but they may emphasise the need for a broader regionalised approach to waste.

EDUCATION AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

51. Recycling initiatives will only work if there is public involvement and commitment. Education in ‘green issues’ is a start, but may need to be backed up by stronger measures. Some authorities have adopted an approach whereby it is made clear to residents what will be collected, when and what is expected of them. The extent and compatibility of such an approach may need to be considered as part of the BV review (BOX 17).

BOX 17 Birmingham City Council

‘Requests for … services are handled by the Council’s recycling officers and the department hotline for waste services. We found a good range of information about the service on the Council’s internet site – this included information on opening hours, how to recycle different materials and how to complain or request information about the service. However, we visited libraries and neighbourhood offices and there was no easily accessible information on display.’

Source: Best value inspection report

52. One authority has introduced a system whereby if the council picks up a bin for recyclables in which the resident has placed non-recyclable waste, the operative reports this contamination to the council, which then writes to the resident asking them in future to place non-recyclable material in the appropriate bin. If the resident continues to
contaminate the recyclables, their recycling bin is removed, leaving them with one bin for all of their household waste.

53. A proactive approach is required to educate the public to use recycled products and to buy goods with less packaging. A number of officers and members emphasised the need to go into schools and educate children, to ensure that younger people learn about the importance of recycling and waste minimisation, that it is a global issue and is linked to sustainable development. One contractor, however, while clearly proactive in educating about waste management, questioned which age groups were the best to target, arguing that with older children the battle may have already been lost. Knowsley already has innovative programmes in place for schools, and identified a lack of co-ordination between departments, with duplication of effort often occurring. Knowsley is now addressing this.

FUTURE PLANNING AND DESIGN

54. The importance of future planning and the design of new housing was highlighted in interviews with both technical officers and refuse operatives. Some local authorities now stipulate in planning advice that any new build should provide space for receptacles for waste for both recycling and composting. Another problem concerned poor access for refuse vehicles to new developments with a consequent negative impact on the potential for kerbside collection.

55. Birmingham City Council’s planning policies require supermarkets to include an area set aside for recycling. Inspectors took a positive view of this and thought that consideration should be given to extending it to developments such as flats.

*   *   *

56. There is thus a wide range of practice and experience identified at inspection or by Audit Commission fieldwork. But what works well in one authority’s circumstances will not necessarily work in another. The ideas, however, may merit some consideration or at least an evaluation of how the problem might be overcome. The checklists at the end of each section flag up some of the key questions that will need to be considered as part of the BV review. The checklist is intended to help local authorities to address the full range of issues, but should be taken as a starting point rather than an exhaustive or definitive list.
CHECKLIST – RECYCLING

RECYCLING

Have we informed residents and explained the need to make changes to the waste collection arrangements?

Are we clear about what our residents expect from their various waste services:
- recycling?
- kerbside collections of recyclables (when and what)?
- bring sites?
- facilities at civic amenity sites?
- wheeled bins, black sacks, etc?
- bulky collection service?

And what are they prepared to pay for?

Are recycling facilities currently available to all our residents?

Are we aware of the impact of varying designs of housing on recycling arrangements?

Does the BV review address the tensions between recycling targets and the expectations reflected in performance indicators?

Do we know what works at other authorities?

Have we tried to adapt the successful schemes to our own authority?

Have we considered establishing a kerbside collection system, for example, in the first instance for paper?

Have we explored the potential for savings when establishing a recycling scheme (such as alternate collections, partnerships with neighbouring authorities, partnerships with the voluntary sector)?

Are recycling credits being used to improve waste services?

When implementing fundamental changes, do we provide residents with:
- accessible support systems?
- clear information?

Do we:
- involve stakeholders and users at an early stage?
- seek to maximise acceptance and participation?
- set clear and achievable objectives?
- ensure that the scheme infrastructure is effective but also convenient to householders?
- have in place sound financial management and planning?

Do procurement policies (within waste and across the council) promote the use of recycled materials, both internally and externally?

MARKETS

Have we established what markets exist for recyclables?

Do we have markets for our recyclable waste?

Are these markets sustainable?
## CIVIC AMENITY/BRING SITES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there recycling at civic amenity sites?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are our civic amenity sites user-friendly:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- clear signage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- easily accessible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- clarity about what can be recycled?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- clean?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have we considered changing the name of our sites, to household waste recycling centres, for example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does our civic amenity site provision complement local household collection arrangements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have we considered the need for a mobile civic amenity site?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is any current mobile civic amenity site providing value for money and ability to maximise potential for recycling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have we considered the consequences of restricting access to our sites, not only on our own residents but also the impact on neighbouring authorities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are bring sites accessible both for pedestrians and people in cars?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are bring sites cleared and cleaned regularly?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## PACKAGING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do we assist in educating the public to use recycled products and to buy goods with less packaging?</td>
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LEARNING from INSPECTION

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26 WASTE MANAGEMENT – GUIDANCE FOR IMPROVING SERVICES
THE CHALLENGE

57. Waste minimisation is a comparatively neglected area, but one which must be addressed in tandem with recycling. The volume of waste generated is growing faster than the rise in the recycling rate, and is predicted to increase by 30 per cent in volume over the next ten years. Since 1993/94, most authorities have increased the proportion of waste that is recycled by between 2 and 8 per cent, but the amount of waste produced grew by 18 per cent. Given the rising pressures on the various disposal options (such as availability of landfill sites and public hostility to energy from waste plants) and the consequent cost implications, there is a need for positive action to reduce the tonnage of waste produced.

58. Central government has provided some mechanisms such as the Waste Minimisation Act 1998, but the House of Commons Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs has commented that ‘the Government does not appear to be taking waste minimisation seriously. There are few significant measures aimed at minimising the amount of waste and the [Waste] Strategy [2000] embraces the current and future growth of municipal waste, rather than challenging it’ while ‘another strand of evidence that the Government is failing to take waste minimisation seriously is that it has yet to produce guidance on the Waste Minimisation Act 1998’ (ref. 9).

59. Clearly, central government has a key role in developing approaches to minimising waste, but waste reduction also presents a major challenge to local authorities as improvement relies on the co-operation and actions of the public. Nevertheless, the minimisation of waste must underpin the way in which a local authority plans and manages its waste services. However, most early BV reviews at best acknowledge waste minimisation as only one element of a developing waste strategy, and rarely identify practical options to support improvement.

60. There is little evidence of action on the principle of transferring more responsibility for waste on to those who produce it. In addition, any move in this direction may lead to some conflict with the BV requirements relating to user needs and expectations. Best value consultation steers local authorities into involving the public in defining their waste management process. ‘Authorities have concluded increasingly that the traditional passive consultation approach to strategic planning is unlikely to provide the degree of public support for the required waste management strategies’ (ref. 12). Local authorities will need to consider both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ approaches to engaging with people. Approaches will need to reflect the characteristics of different areas, and initiatives should reflect these where they can be proven to exist.
LACK OF EFFORT TO EDUCATE AND INFORM THE PUBLIC

61. Inspection evidence showed that there is still only limited basic information for the public about what happens to waste and what it costs. The potential for improvement appears to be considerable. Yet inspections show little evidence of authorities informing residents on what they need to do and how to do it. One head of service commented that, ‘people regard waste collection and waste disposal as a free good. Recycling interferes with people’s expectations for their collection service. What we need is a culture change’ (BOXES 18 and 19).

**BOX 18 Borough Council**

‘The surveys undertaken during the best value process showed that 69 per cent were aware of the paper collection service, but only 34 per cent actually use it. 36 per cent also put their garden waste into the wheel bins, with only 39 per cent composting it. This highlights the need for enhancing public awareness for recycling and waste minimisation, working with schools and voluntary groups as well as providing better public information.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

**BOX 19 Metropolitan Borough Council**

‘Many of the issues around Saturday collections are to do as much with re-education as with contracts, persuading people not to generate so much waste, and to recycle more of what they do have. We saw no evidence of a concerted education programme in this area.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*
LOW KEY ACTION ON ENFORCEMENT

62. Although local authorities have powers to take action against those that litter and dump rubbish they are little used when compared to the scale of the problem and the importance attached to the cleanliness of the environment by the public. Enforcement is not itself a major driver for waste reduction, but over and above the impact on improving the environment, it can heighten local awareness of the need for a responsible public view and action on waste.

63. At a number of authorities, refuse collectors reported finding clear evidence at fly tips, often of the same offender, or of inappropriate waste brought for disposal, but the council would not prosecute. At one inspection, an officer stated that ‘this is not an enforcement authority’, a view that was common.

64. A number of authorities raised concerns over the perceived willingness of government departments to assist local government in enforcement, citing mainly negative (and only a few positive) experiences of dealing with the Environment Agency. A number of instances were noted during inspections where the Environment Agency was seen as undermining the effort and resources of local authority officers in reducing fly tipping. Local authorities alone are unable to prosecute fly tippers: prosecution is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, and the enforcement officers were described by some as ‘toothless tigers’ (BOX 20).

BOX 20  Fly tipping and the Environment Agency

One metropolitan authority gave specific examples of fly tipping where the authority had collected evidence to identify the tipper to present to the Environment Agency for prosecution. The fly tipper was regularly dumping around 50 tonnes of building refuse in the drives and front gardens of empty council houses. However the Environment Agency refused to act, and although the council recognised the fly tipper, they were unable to stop the illegal dumping and were left to find the resources daily to remove the refuse. Ultimately the authority decided that they had no option but to stop clearing this refuse and accept that the performance indicator for length of time taken to remove fly tips would show them as poor.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

WASTE MINIMISATION AS AN ADD-ON, NOT AT THE CORE OF IMPROVEMENT

65. There is considerable awareness within local government about recycling, waste minimisation and treatment of green waste, but action and initiatives to involve and encourage people to recycle and/or remove waste from the waste stream are far from universal. Inspection evidence suggests that where such measures are in place it has been more of an add-on rather than being at the heart of any improvement plan. For example, there is wide variation in the rate of progress with home composting initiatives. Some waste collection authorities have established centralised composting initiatives, while others provide no green waste collection or composting; the provision of home composters to households is still limited.
ACTION TO OVERCOME BARRIERS – WASTE MINIMISATION

EDUCATION

66. Authorities are becoming more proactive in informing the public about the costs and pressures of waste generation and disposal. But people still need to be better informed about how they can help to reduce waste. If local authorities are to achieve demanding minimisation and recycling targets, they should be considering comprehensive publicity strategies to highlight the need to reduce waste and to inform residents clearly about what will and will not be provided in refuse collection and other waste services (BOX 21).

Informing and educating people about the impact and costs of waste management is difficult but important.

BOX 21 Borough Council

‘Within the Improvement Plan there needs to be a waste minimisation strategy, which will lead to improved recycling of household waste and an education programme to encourage the public to participate. There is evidence from the surveys undertaken that the public do wish to be involved in enhanced services for waste minimisation and recycling and some have indicated they are prepared to pay for it.’

Source: Best value inspection report

67. A number of authorities, (including Croydon, Wolverhampton, Camden, and Sedgefield) have produced ‘Environmental Wall Planners’. As well as information on the councils’ refuse and recycling collections, and addresses of bring sites, they also provide contact numbers for matters such as bulky waste collections, commercial waste services and abandoned vehicles. The publication is self-financing, being produced to a common format with support from advertisers.

68. An education campaign will need to be sustained to be effective. However, the evidence suggests that few authorities have yet to adopt a proactive approach to educate the public about the waste consequences of using various products. There is some evidence of councils starting with schools and council workplaces to lead by example with the use of recycled paper and other waste awareness initiatives (BOX 22). The intention is that, for example, school children would be more proactive in ensuring that recycling and composting is practised at home. However a number of authorities reported that local schools at lunchtime were litter ‘hot spots’ and these should be a prime target for combined education and enforcement initiatives (BOXES 23 and 24).

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1 The fact that households have their waste removed on a regular basis leads to a significant public underestimate of the nature and scale of the problem. (ref. 13)
East Sussex policy is to make officers aware of waste as well as the public. For example, council officers take used paper into meetings instead of new notepaper. The authority has a waste awareness project team, and green housekeeping project within the county. ‘No time to waste’ leaflets, which are distributed to all households in the county, present the volume of waste generated in the area in easily understandable terms for example the amount of waste produced each year ‘would fill the Royal Albert Hall 15 times’. The leaflet also outlines the problem that the authority has with reducing landfill capacity and shows how residents can play their part.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

Gateshead has developed a website with interactive material linked to recycling and in line with the schools curriculum. The site features a character ‘Orson Cart’ who explains about recycling and waste management. Gateshead MBC has links to the schools in the borough. The staff from the Environmental Services Group take material into schools and refuse vehicles are taken to show the pupils how they operate. The schools follow projects with Waste Watch, Eco-schools and the Healthy Schools Programme. These all recognise the value of recycling and link the work into the national curriculum.

Source: Audit Commission research

The County Council and the district authorities within the county have established the Norfolk Waste Management Partnership. As part of their joint waste management strategy they recommended implementing the Schools Waste Action Club (SWAC) in Norfolk’s schools. SWAC is an education project run by Waste Watch. SWAC is a free resource for schools which links curriculum based activities in Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4, to practical waste reduction initiatives. Pupils and staff are guided through the identification of waste issues within their school and are encouraged to develop their own waste minimisation plan.

Source: Audit Commission research

In the BV review local authorities will need to include robust analyses of the waste produced and collected in the area, and try to identify the causes and sources of growth. In shire county areas a partnership approach should be considered. They will then need to establish practical and challenging targets for reducing volumes of waste produced and consider options for linking these with education and awareness strategies. There is the danger that the responsibility for educating people about environmental aims and objectives falls within a number of council departments and it is essential that there is co-ordination to ensure that efforts are complementary rather than a duplication (BOXES 25, 26, 27 and 28).

Further information can be obtained from Norfolk Waste Management Partnership’s website, found at http://www.resource-not-waste.co.uk.
BOX 25  Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The Council sees public education and awareness about cleanliness issues as being key to the future success of these services. Staff are encouraged to engage with the community and to lead local environmental initiatives. There are many initiatives taking place in Knowsley aimed at addressing people’s behaviour and social attitudes. A more co-ordinated corporate strategy for environmental education and awareness, targeting all sections of the community, would assist the Council to achieve its objectives for a cleaner Knowsley.

The Council’s work on environment education and awareness programmes is currently spread over several departments. A more corporate, strategic approach to this important area would build on existing achievements and deliver a more powerful message to local people about their personal responsibilities for environment issues.

Developing the above recommendation, the authority should lead a multi-agency approach towards changing social attitudes towards the environment by developing further the work being done with schools and the wider community.’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 26  South Gloucestershire Council

‘As a result of this work, the Council has confidence that a carefully managed and sustained programme of education and persuasion will be successful in ‘winning hearts and minds’ in terms of changed patterns of waste management behaviour by the people of South Gloucestershire. The contractor considers the targets to be realistic and achievable – provided that the contract’s intentions in respect of education and persuasion are carried into effect at an early stage. This depends on commitment by the Council as well as contractor performance.’

‘...a robust communications and publicity strategy is vital to the success of the [R3] programme. It needs to shape public thinking to secure a change in behaviour, build public commitment to recycling, and secure residents’ willingness to revised approaches to future collection systems. In essence, the Council needs to develop a ‘marketing strategy’ which will convince residents to support actively the ‘Reduce, Re-use and Recycle’ brand. The timetable for implementation cannot afford to slip, despite the day-to-day operational pressures.

Source: Best Value inspection report

BOX 27  Warrington Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The Council has done a lot of work to prevent litter and has worked with schools and organisations to educate people. It also employs two litter wardens to monitor and prevent problems. The Council has also fined people for dropping litter. There are, however, signs that the educational work is beginning to slip as resources are redirected elsewhere.’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 28  Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

At Gateshead MBC, the enforcement officer from the environmental services group, and the environmental health officers have jointly worked on a programme of education and action to reduce the waste which householders have left outside their back gates before or after their wheel bin collection. The result has been a significant reduction of unbinned waste.

Source: Audit Commission research
ENFORCEMENT

70. The BV review will need to address the authority’s record on enforcement on litter and fly tipping with reasons for the level of formal (in)action and consideration as to whether a more proactive approach is called for. Local authorities should examine their enforcement procedures, questioning whether the level of enforcement is adequate and whether sufficient publicity has been given to those instances where illegal dumpers or trade waste abusers have been successfully prosecuted. Authorities will also need to monitor the waste generated to identify the extent to which household waste is being supplemented by commercial and other non-municipal waste.

71. The local authority should also consider its relationship with the Environment Agency, the police and other interested public agencies to ensure a co-ordinated and action orientated approach to enforcement, for example, by increasing action against and prosecution of fly tippers. This will demonstrate to both miscreants and the public at large that illegal dumping will not be tolerated (BOXES 29 and 30).

BOX 29  London Borough of Brent

‘The Council is aware that tougher enforcement is needed … including the use of existing options such as legislation and CCTV. Members agreed in 2000 to allocate an additional £135,000 to street cleansing to meet users needs and improve performance. This has been used in a number of different ways including the extension of evening sweeping in town centres to 10pm, the recruitment of two enforcement officers and the extension of telephone cover to 8pm.

In some areas joint enforcement was needed to deliver service improvements. Examples of such work within StreetCare include the Litchfield Gardens NW10 and Belton Road projects where users had highlighted a problem with abandoned vehicles. Several businesses had set up under one roof and were the source of many complaints received by several departments of the council and outside agencies. It was agreed that “joined up” enforcement was needed. Following the enforcement action, visits to the area by the local StreetCare officer show that there is a marked decrease in the illegal and inconsiderate activity by the businesses within the premises making for a better environment for the local community.’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 30  London Borough of Waltham Forest

‘It does have a good record of prosecuting the illegal dumping of trade waste. 3,784 reports of illegal dumping (all types) in 1999 and 3,158 in 2000. Most of it is reactive to complaints received … letters, members etc. Waltham Forest was the first borough to successfully prosecute for illegal dumping using CCTV evidence and during 2000 there were 68 successful prosecutions for illegal dumping. Waltham Forest is going to promote waste minimisation among local businesses by setting up a waste minimisation club.’

Source: Best value inspection report
COMPOSTING

72. Households and local authorities in England produce some five million tonnes of green waste annually (ref. 14). The introduction of recycling facilities for green waste (collected or deposited at civic amenity sites) will increase the rate of recycling, and a growing number of authorities have put in place kerbside collections for green waste for composting. Although this does not reduce the tonnage entering the household waste stream it does reduce the amount for disposal and hence the cost.

73. Home composting represents a positive option with the benefit of reducing the total waste generated without the need for continued local authority resourcing, but, ironically, home composting is not reflected in the recycling performance indicator, since it never enters the waste stream but reduces the volume of waste collected. Although it is difficult to assess the amount of waste that is recycled in this way, estimates of composting would be of benefit to local authorities and to the public in demonstrating their contribution to waste reduction. Home composting also has an impact on the best value performance indicator measuring the tonnage of waste generated per household.

74. Wealden has a composting hotline and website links to a range of international composting organisations. Croydon sells commercially its own compost, Croypost, ‘made from plant and green horticultural feedstock composted locally in Croydon. Two metropolitan authorities have pursued similar approaches with central composting and sales of the resulting product (BOXES 31 and 32) while Warwickshire County Council has recently entered into a ten-year contract for the central composting of green waste. Another initiative becoming increasingly common is on-farm composting (BOX 33).

**BOX 31** Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The Council has recently begun to segregate green and inert waste at the civic amenity site. This has generated an additional £92,500 in the last 12 months. This has been done through a … scheme that separates green waste, composites it and then makes it available for sale at the civic amenity site as soil improver, completing the recycling loop.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

**BOX 32** Metropolitan Borough Council

‘…has included in its integrated waste management strategy, following a BV review, the requirement for a municipal composter to reduce the 19,000 tonnes of green waste currently collected in wheel bins. Neighbourhood collection points for green waste (which will include green waste from council owned parks and open spaces) will go to the composter. After obtaining accreditation from the Soil Association the compost will then be sold to meet the local market garden demand.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

**BOX 33** East Sussex County Council

East Sussex found that changing to on-farm composting, as opposed to disposal in a landfill site, cost approximately the same as landfill disposal, taking account of landfill tax and transport costs.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*
75. South Gloucestershire Council has recently agreed a long-term Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract for integrated waste management, and composting figures prominently in the contractor’s plans. There is a target to ‘supply composters to 45 per cent of households with gardens by 2002’ and an undertaking ‘to work with community groups to promote community composting.’ In addition, there is a financial incentive to ‘increase levels of home composting by providing for deductions from the annual payments if the tonnage of household waste composted at home does not meet the agreed target for the year.’ Epsom and Ewell Borough Council offered residents three months free use of home composters with the option of purchase at a discount if people wished to continue, while other local authorities are also starting to encourage greater home composting (BOX 34).

**BOX 34 City Council**

‘Over the last three years, the Council, in conjunction with private companies, has distributed over 13,000 home composters to residents in order to promote the home composting of green garden and vegetable waste. Additionally, it collects paper for recycling from 225 offices and glass bottles from 340 public houses and clubs.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

76. In 2000 a study on behalf of the European Commission emphasised that ‘the most important overriding factor for a successful scheme is good publicity and information, ensuring that stakeholders and scheme participants are involved in the scheme at an early stage, maximising acceptance and participation rates. Most schemes used a variety of different methods to convey their message to householders (ref. 15). The study identified the key success factors for separate collection composting schemes to be:

- setting clear, achievable objectives for the scheme;
- establishing the right mix of waste types to target;
- ensuring the scheme infrastructure is organised so as to be effective and also convenient to householders;
- establishing a market for an end product which is clean due to the separate collection of biodegradable waste;
- sound financial management and planning; and
- organising a wide-ranging publicity and information campaign for the scheme, ensuring that the local public is as widely involved in the scheme as possible, particularly in the early stages of scheme development.

* * *

77. Waste minimisation needs a proactive approach from local authorities, in terms of educating and supporting the public through measures such as composting green waste at home and/or centrally. But enforcement is another strand where most local authorities will need to consider whether a more proactive approach is needed.
CHECKLIST – WASTE MINIMISATION

EDUCATION
Do we have a comprehensive strategy for publicising minimisation and recycling targets?
Do we promote ways in which local people can help to achieve them?
Are residents made aware of the impact and costs of waste management?
Do approaches to engaging residents reflect the characteristics of different areas?
Is educational material available in more than one language?
Have we set up education programmes in school around waste minimisation and re-use?
Have we ensured that education and action on waste minimisation between departments is co-ordinated?
Does the council lead by example in using recycled products, and minimising waste?

ENFORCEMENT
Do we have a policy on enforcement for:
- fly tippers?
- street litter?
- other waste issues?
Is the level of enforcement adequate?
Have we made any successful prosecutions? If not, why not?
Is a more proactive approach required regarding prosecution?
Have we publicised any successful prosecutions?
Do we have a policy regarding trade waste abuse?
Do we work well with the Environment Agency, the police and other interested public agencies?

COMPOSTING
Do we collect organic waste separately?
Do we supply home composters, and are they easily available?
Have we considered other forms of composting such as community, on farm, municipal?
Have we considered ways of estimating the amount of waste composted at home?

OTHER
Is there an analysis of the waste produced and collected in the BV review?
Can we identify the causes and sources of growth in waste?
Have we set up targets for reducing the amount of waste produced?
78. Authorities have to meet short-term statutory targets while recognising the need to develop and deliver longer-term sustainable waste management policies. But it can be difficult for elected members, conscious of the electoral cycle, to take the necessary long-term and difficult decisions, given the need for long-term commitment to improve waste disposal facilities whether energy from waste plants, landfill sites, composters or reclamation plants. Often these decisions are highly sensitive in terms of the planning system and local opinion, but such decisions cannot be put off.

79. The 1999 EC Landfill Directive requires substantial changes to the management of waste. The main objective of the Directive is to address the pressures consequent on the reduction (ref. 2) in available landfill sites. This is allied to ensuring high standards for the disposal of waste, to stimulate recycling and recovery of waste, and to reduce emissions of methane (BOX 35).

**BOX 35 Main requirements of the EC Landfill Directive**

- by 2016, reduce biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) to landfill to 35 per cent of total BMW (by weight) produced in 1995. Intermediate targets of 75 per cent by 2006, and 50 per cent by 2009 have also been agreed.
- bans co-disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous wastes, and requiring separate landfills for hazardous, non-hazardous and inert wastes.
- bans landfilling of tyres (by 2003 for whole tyres, 2006 for shredded tyres).
- bans landfilling of liquid wastes, infectious clinical waste and certain types of hazardous waste (for example, explosive, highly flammable), all by 2001.
- sets out provisions on the control, monitoring, reporting and closure of sites.

*Source: EC Directive 1999/31/EC on the Landfill of Waste*

80. Currently 83 per cent of municipal waste is landfilled (EXHIBIT 5) and central government sees this as incompatible with a more sustainable economy. As a result of the EC Landfill Directive, the Landfill Tax, and the proximity principle, authorities such as Bedfordshire and Warwickshire, who historically have taken waste from the London and West Midlands, are now looking to end this. Other long-term methods of disposal therefore are required to reduce the percentage of waste going to landfill.
In 1999/2000, Wales had the greatest proportion of waste disposed of in landfill sites.


81. In the short-term, decisions need to be made around each authority’s future method of disposal, and strategies need to be developed (as part of their integrated waste management strategy and waste local plan) to ensure that the required infrastructure is put in place.

82. There are also other short-term priorities such as maintaining service quality, reflecting local needs and controlling costs. But there is an argument that compliance with immediate targets is more important, for example one officer stated ‘it’s the targets and not sustainability that we are focusing on’. Long-term sustainability has become less of a priority for authorities in their bids to meet the short-term targets and the consequent threat if they are not met.

83. The Mayor of London has recently produced a draft municipal waste management strategy for consultation (ref. 16). It includes the statement that ‘the strategy is a visionary strategy, which sets out clearly where we want to be in 2020, and also an operational strategy covering the period up to 2005.’ Clearly, most local authorities will not be thinking on the scale needed for London, but a longer-term vision is key to planning future developments and improvements to waste services.
**BARRIERS**

**SHORT-TERM POLITICAL PRESSURES**

84. The local political context can present a significant barrier to the development of a longer-term approach to waste management, given that it is a highly visible public and local service with immediate day-to-day impact on people. In a number of inspected authorities there were examples where members have acted on short-term initiatives in line with public preferences regardless of the results of the best value review. For example, there was evidence of members being unwilling to change collection systems with high satisfaction levels to incorporate recycling schemes.

85. In others, members determined the main outcomes of the review before it had taken place, putting pressure on officers to carry out the review in a way that reflected the political will rather than an objective and challenging review. One senior officer commented that members took ‘political not operational decisions’, for example, paying £55,000 rent annually for a civic amenity site with low throughput and being unwilling to explore less costly alternatives. Service managers continually have to balance the conflict between maintaining a high level of public satisfaction, addressing member priorities, meeting national targets and delivering continuous improvement.

86. A common complaint in a number of local authorities concerned the actions of individual members. Examples ranged from continually telephoning the service to complain about leaves or missed bins at their own properties, (with operatives returning to rectify the situation to find no genuine problem or a very small piece of refuse not collected), to members putting out garden waste when the authority’s policy is not to collect garden waste. A number of authorities also highlighted that members give residents the wrong information about what the council will provide, often in line with what they thought
should be provided. Members should be clear about the policy and practical details relating to the service before pursuing remedial action in response to public complaints.

87. Members may only be in office for a single term. A number of authorities raised concerns about new members reviewing a policy or course of action already being implemented and then wanting to change direction solely for short-term purposes. At one authority, members would not take action on important issues unless an election was imminent. In another, the problem of addressing the rapidly reducing capacity of landfill was seen as too complex a problem for new members to tackle immediately. Members may even decide to defer the review for a few years.

88. A further difficult area for members, especially in county councils and unitary authorities, concerns the determination of planning applications for landfill sites and incinerators (energy from waste plants). The public perception of such developments is rarely positive and elected members can be certain that substantial local opposition is probable. Making these decisions is difficult, and members often hope that the Secretary of State will intervene, or favour an option which does least harm to their own constituents. Such approaches without any contingency arrangements can lead to more difficult political decisions at a later stage.

INCREASING COSTS OF DISPOSAL AND RECYCLING

89. The immediate costs facing waste collection and waste disposal authorities, are those of the increasing landfill tax, and the costs incurred in the need to meet recycling targets. Longer-term pressures on costs are those imposed by the EC Landfill Directive requirements and targets.

90. The Government introduced the Landfill Tax in October 1996. The tax had an explicit environmental objective, that is, to discourage disposal by landfill, and the Government argues, is already having a notable impact on waste management practices. However the House of Commons Select Committee takes the view that the landfill tax at its present level is too small an incentive to change established behaviour significantly: ‘it is little more than an irritant to those making provision for waste management. The Government should have the courage of its convictions and use the Landfill Tax to provide a strong incentive to move away from a landfill-based system of waste disposal’ (ref. 9).

91. Landfill tax appears to have had some adverse effects, for example, increasing the cost of skip hire because of the extra costs of disposal. This has meant it is cheaper to dispose of waste through civic amenity sites, bulky waste collections, fly tipping, or even the weekly household collection whenever possible and an increasing number of authorities have introduced measures to discourage this.

92. Linked to the tax is the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, whereby landfill operators can claim up to 90 per cent tax credit against donations they make to approved environmental bodies. However, the scheme does not allow for landfill tax credit to be used by local authorities to set up recycling or waste minimisation initiatives or to finance the introduction of kerbside collection of recyclables. These credits may not exceed 20 per cent of an operator’s annual landfill tax bill. Environmental bodies may carry out activities, defined in regulations, which include:

- reclamation of polluted land;
• research and education activities to promote re-use and recycling;
• provision of public parks and amenities; and
• restoration of historic buildings.

The House of Commons Select Committee has also raised doubts about the efficacy of the present arrangements commenting that ‘the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme provides a convoluted and, to date, ineffective method of funding sustainable waste management’ (ref. 9).

93. The EC Landfill Directive increases pressure on authorities to find alternative means for the disposal of waste. Planning for the longer term is essential as many landfill sites are coming to the end of their capacity. Early inspection evidence suggests that few authorities have genuinely taken a longer-term view of waste disposal and the implications of compliance with the Landfill Directive.

LACK OF FIT BETWEEN STATUTORY, CORPORATE AND OPERATIONAL SERVICE PLANS

94. There are two dimensions to the planning of waste services, namely, statutory plans, which have increased significantly over the last decade, and the strategic, community and service plans relating specifically to the local authority. Both of these can be resource intensive and, if not managed well, can quickly become ends in themselves rather than means to the end of improved and sustainable waste services.

95. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Section 49), each individual waste collection authority is required to prepare a Recycling Plan, while the development of Local Agenda 21 has also had implications for the long-term sustainability of local authority waste services. Additionally, waste management is subject to the national planning framework and the requirement to have a Waste Local Plan or Part II to the Unitary Development Plan, while the national waste strategy supports the development of community plans.

96. There are both short-term and long-term aspects to the planning of waste management services. Evidence suggests that few authorities have clear aims and objectives that fit with and complement those of the authority overall, as well as reflecting short-term priorities. Some authorities have local waste strategies but these have never been widespread. In addition, a service or business plan is necessary to ensure efficient and effective provision within an agreed budget and these do exist in some form in many local authorities. A view common to a number of inspections is that challenge requires the council to consider and demonstrate how the service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans, and how these in turn fit in a coherent way with the statutory plans and strategies. Most authorities have yet to address this.
ACTION TO OVERCOME BARRIERS – LONG AND SHORT-TERM TRADE-OFFS

THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

97. On the whole, those authorities making service improvements were those where members had a strong commitment to working with officers and a recognition of the balancing necessary in making service decisions. For example, in Leeds members established a cross-party task group to oversee the development of an integrated waste management strategy for the city, acknowledging that there were important political decisions to be made.

98. The BV review process represents an opportunity to challenge the current culture and to implement the changes that are required to achieve measurable improvements while meeting national targets. However, in order to bring about this change additional resources may be required, leading to the need for decisions about generating further investment, possibly from external sources, or the redirection of resources within the authority (BOX 36). Evidence of public support for new approaches to waste collection and disposal may provide elected members with the incentive to take the hard decisions needed for necessary changes to take place in waste services.

BOX 36 South Gloucestershire Council

The Council has moved from a waste collection and disposal service (with an emphasis on disposal) to a service based on the integration of both. The service has a new focus, on recycling and sustainable waste management. The Council recognised early in the review the potential for an integrated approach to waste management to enable it to meet key sustainability objectives, for example, increasing recycling and minimising landfill.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

99. Members need to be actively involved with BV reviews but with a wider vision than just short-term political goals, seeking to achieve real improvements. A fully challenged BV review requires the full commitment of members. Long-term decisions about waste are essential if an authority is going to achieve long-term targets, and members will need to take that agenda forward.

100. Clearly, a key role for members is to develop a vision for their authority and take the decisions needed to achieve it. But members can also have a more practical role in educating and informing residents about the nature of the services provided and explaining why they take the form they do. One example of this positive and practical role was where the member(s) responsible for environment were informed that if, for example, a refuse collection vehicle was unlikely to complete a round due to bad weather. If residents contacted the member(s) to complain about a missed bin they were in a position to give an explanation and reassurance.

LANDFILL TAX CREDIT SCHEME

101. With local authorities excluded from direct participation in the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, their role instead is to influence and motivate environmental bodies or groups to develop initiatives to tap in to the tax to assist in reducing the tonnage of household waste for
disposal and increase recycling. There was some evidence to suggest that, with a number of other targets and initiatives and the lack of direct involvement this has been a low priority for most authorities. Local authorities will have to continue to work at maximising the benefits that exist within the current restrictive framework until central government chooses to revisit this area.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO LANDFILL

102. Although 8 per cent of waste is disposed of by incineration, predominantly through energy from waste, there is little evidence of authorities genuinely exploring alternative methods of disposal such as biothermal. It could be argued that local authorities should not necessarily take the lead, but active involvement in partnerships with such objectives will need increasingly to be explored and some are already happening, for example, Wirral is working with the University of Liverpool, AMEC, Groundwork and British Gas on a biowaste treatment plant.

SERVICE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

103. To deliver best value, local authorities should have in place a planning framework at the corporate level which makes clear what it is seeking to achieve (aims and objectives), what it needs to do (priorities) and a means to monitor performance. The outcomes from the planning process should then be key considerations in the BV review of the service.

104. The planning of the service should address both immediate and long-term priorities, balancing competing service demands, recognising resource constraints, addressing user needs and involving the community and other stakeholders. Many local authorities have now started to address this in a more robust manner and the assumptions used in such a planning process will provide key information for the BV review (BOXES 37 and 38).

BOX 37  Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

‘...there is a strategic approach to service delivery across the Council. Knowsley recognises that wider social issues need to be taken into account in the delivery of environment services. There has been effective and wide-ranging consultation with local people by an independent agency and key priorities for the community have been identified.’

Source: Best value inspection report

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1 The first load of waste was taken to the plant on 2 April 2001. Within the plant, putrescible waste is turned into inert waste and heat and CO2 is used in the adjoining greenhouses. Methane is pulled off and burnt in the turbine, and the spare energy will go into the National Grid.
BOX 38  Warrington Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The Community Plan sets out clear targets for services to address these local and national issues. It sets targets for the following areas in 2001/02:

- to increase recycling levels to 12.95 per cent;
- to compost 5 per cent of waste;
- to reduce the amount of waste to landfill from 83.79 per cent to 81.31 per cent; and
- to reduce the number of missed bins per 100,000 collections from 50 to 45.

The services link well into other priority areas for the Council. In particular, there are strong linkages with the Council’s social inclusion policy and the environmental agenda set out in the Local Agenda 21 strategy.’

Source: Best value inspection report

105. This range of plans will require better co-ordination within local authorities, but they should not become an end in themselves. However, there is evidence of a lack of co-ordination of corporate policies and plans which has led to incompatible service policy decisions. In one authority, an issue arose around the BV review outlining one course of action for the development of waste services while the Waste Local Plan outlined another. Conflict occurred where the BV review team, including members, favoured a waste to energy plant but the Waste Local Plan excluded such an approach to waste disposal.

* * *

106. The short-term nature of both the local and the national political agendas as well central government expectations and targets make a longer-term planned approach to service improvement problematic. Nevertheless a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to service planning and budgeting can only help the development of best value waste services.
## CHECKLIST – LONG AND SHORT-TERM TRADE-OFFS

### POLITICAL CONTEXT
- Do members tend to take operational rather than strategic decisions?
- Can members be said to have a longer-term view of waste management issues?
- Do we have good relationships with neighbouring authorities at:
  - member level?
  - officer level?
- If not, do we know why not? Do we know how to change this?
- Are members clear about the policy and practical details relating to the service when pursuing remedial action in response to public complaints?
- Do we have information on the level of public support for new approaches to waste collection?

### COSTS
- Have we calculated the costs of landfill disposal over the next 10 years?
- Have we considered the effect of the accumulating landfill tax on services such as:
  - skip hire?
  - bulky waste collections?
- Have we planned for recycling costs increasing long-term?
- Have redirection of resources been away from or to waste services?
- Have we taken full advantage of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme?
- Have we considered motivating environmental bodies to develop initiatives to tap into landfill tax credits?

### SERVICE PLANNING FRAMEWORK
- Does the authority have in place a clear planning framework with aims and objectives, agreed priorities and a means to monitor performance?
- Do the aims and objectives for the waste service fit with and complement those of the authority overall?
- Have we considered how the wider plans, such as the community plan, fit together with the service plans and the long and short-term priorities?
- Does the planning process reflect the need for links between the plans?
- Is there a robust service or business plan linked to the budget?
- Does the planning of the service:
  - address both immediate and long-term priorities?
  - balance competing service demands?
  - recognise resource constraints?
  - address user needs?
  - involve the community and other stakeholders?
SECTION 4: PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE THE WHOLE WASTE STREAM

THE CHALLENGE – LOCAL AUTHORITIES

107. *Waste Strategy 2000* underlines the importance of moving to a fully integrated waste management system, based on active partnerships between local authorities. The framework for each of these partnerships is the Municipal Waste Management Strategy which sets out the strategic framework for the management of municipal waste, jointly developed and subscribed to by waste collection authorities (WCAs) and waste disposal authorities (WDAs).

108. Constructive partnerships between waste collection and waste disposal authorities are essential. And, as a result of both legislation and more open approaches to service delivery, authorities are increasingly working in partnership with a variety of other organisations and people. How these relationships are handled and how they work overall will be key factors in delivering services that fit with the duty of best value and achieve statutory targets.

109. Waste collection cannot be divorced from waste disposal. Early inspection evidence suggests that local authorities working within a two-tier structure face a more difficult task in achieving recycling standards and that effective partnership working will be particularly critical. Authorities who can control the refuse collection method, recycling scheme and disposal of household waste may be finding an integrated approach to waste management less difficult than districts.

110. Waste disposal authorities cannot deliver their targets without discussion with waste collection authorities. But early inspections in a number of district councils contain little or no evidence of consultation with the county council. Even in county areas where there is positive joint working there was no co-ordination of BV review programmes for waste services. It is increasingly difficult to consider one activity in isolation, for example the impact of refuse collection methods on the potential for increased and more efficient recycling. Yet a number of district council early reviews were driven by the need to re-let contracts, and largely ignored the fit with any waste strategy which the county council might be developing.

111. *Waste Strategy 2000* stresses the importance of active partnerships between local authorities. In shire counties this will involve the county council as waste disposal authority and the district councils responsible for collection. Unitary authorities should be exploring the potential for working with their neighbouring county areas and districts and/or unitary authorities, and, of course, joint waste disposal authorities where applicable.

112. In most authorities work is in hand preparing and consulting on joint waste strategies. As these come to fruition there will be an expectation that the approach to best value reflects these relationships and joint working. Inspections so far, however, have identified little evidence of positive working between the tiers although it is acknowledged that in many
counties areas relationships and initiatives are making good progress, for instance Hampshire – Project Integra and Norfolk County Council.

113. Some two tier authorities have put together a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ where the waste collection authorities and their waste disposal authority sign up to working together. However, all too frequently this has gone no further, with little evidence of any active implementation. What are needed are equal partnerships between waste disposal authorities and waste collection authorities with clear terms of reference, regular formal meetings and evidence of action consequent on such partnerships.

THE CHALLENGE – EXTERNAL PARTNERS

114. Central government has the expectation that, where appropriate, alternative providers and suppliers should be considered. Local authorities in providing waste services will need to consider all potential types of provision and suppliers to ensure the achievement of value for money. These may be straightforward contractual arrangements or could be some form of partnership with the private or voluntary sector. In considering such options, account will need to be taken of cost and quality, as well as confidence in deliverability.

115. Given that this expectation will be applicable across the range of local authority services, a procurement strategy will be essential to provide a framework to ensure the ‘compete’ requirement is addressed in a robust manner. In turn each BV review will need to reflect the procurement strategy and explore all options including other suppliers and the reshaping of services to ensure efficient and effective services at the best price. Early BV inspections suggest that few local authorities have in place a robust strategy for the procurement of a range of waste management services, including domestic refuse collection, waste disposal and recycling. Many are now seeking to remedy this, but inspectors have highlighted this as an issue.

116. Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) led to a significant increase in the provision of refuse collection and street cleansing services by private sector contractors. In waste disposal, the Environmental Protection Act 1990, resulted in major private sector involvement in the operation and management of waste disposal facilities, while there are some more recent examples of specific contracts for recycling activities. This has meant that for these services there is a relatively mature market, and any local authority considering options for the provision of most waste services will find a number of potential private sector suppliers.

117. Overall there is no evidence that in-house or contracted out waste services are necessarily better or worse, but there is evidence that the local authority will provide better quality services if these relationships are well managed. The most positive relationships have been where client officers are satisfied that the contractor is closely involved in both service development and day-to-day operational changes. Contractor staff will be aware of the demands of the client authority, and their working methods are arranged to fit with these objectives. This does not preclude the existence of robust client monitoring.

118. But as well as private sector contractors, there is an increase in partnership working with a wide range of voluntary groups, particularly in the field of recycling. Local authorities should be able to demonstrate whether there are potential local partners in the voluntary sector and the extent to which joint working has been explored.
LACK OF A CO-ORDINATED AND ACTION ORIENTATED APPROACH

119. Inspection visits have highlighted differing opinions about whether the MWM strategy should be in place before undertaking the BV review or vice versa. Indeed, a number of district councils have been struggling to scope their BV review without a county MWM strategy in place. It was often the case that the county waste strategy was not developed enough to allow integration. Similarly, this has been an issue for some waste collection authorities working alongside a joint waste disposal authority (JWDA).

120. In these circumstances the strategy has been developed in the hope that the waste disposal authority’s strategy will be complementary. Few have considered contingency plans if this is not the case. This is especially important in the district and county relationship where county councils have the responsibility for determining any necessary planning approval. Communication and joint working is essential as authorities must not simply progress at the speed of the slowest.

121. Some districts have been faced with a situation where they either delay their own strategies or tender processes and wait for the consequent repercussions in terms of targets, or they go ahead alone. In some cases the refuse collection contract was re-let in almost identical form with no consideration of a range of alternative methods or links to the county council’s developing strategy.
LACK OF A CULTURE OF JOINT WORKING

122. The inspections identified some examples of hostility and distrust between waste collection and waste disposal authorities. For example, where the waste disposal authority established recyclable collection systems such as the development of a clean or dirty MRF (materials reclamation facility), leaving the waste collection authority no option but to adapt its waste collection method to reflect the current position rather than that recommended in the BV review. There were also disagreements about which authority (the WCA or WDA) would pay for these changes in collection method.

123. There were also examples where the county has taken policy decisions with no consideration of the impact or implications for some or all of the district councils within the area. Most notable were examples of waste disposal authorities changing the opening hours of their waste transfer station to times that did not fit with the refuse collection operational arrangements. One district council described its relationship with the county council as ‘lots of talk, but no action’. District council members put pressure on the county but to no avail. A number of refuse collection contracts were due for renewal but, as a result of waiting for the county to make a decision on landfill and waste disposal, district councils were left with no option but to let short-term contracts. Both officers and members from a number of authorities commented on how the relationships between officers in different authorities were often very good, but relationships at member level were much less positive and co-operative.

THE ABSENCE OF A ROBUST APPROACH TO PROCUREMENT

124. A major barrier to partnership working is the lack of a robust procurement strategy which reflects such an approach. Early BV inspections suggest that few local authorities have addressed this and inspectors have highlighted this as an issue. A key feature of best value is the means by which local authorities go about providing the service, in line with its overall objectives and priorities. The use of contractors had been politically unpalatable to some and best value has been seen as an opportunity to return to or retain in-house provision (BOX 39).

**BOX 39 Metropolitan Borough Council**

‘The review did not address competition. The Council does not have a written procurement strategy for its services we understand because of “industrial relations sensitivities”.

*Source: Best value inspection report*

125. Early BV inspections of waste management, and refuse collection in particular, showed that a number of reviews were driven by the expiry of the current contract and the need for new arrangements (BOX 40).
‘There was evidence that consideration had been given to competition, as the two contracts were being re-tendered during the best value process. However, the basis of the competition was very much a matter of re-tendering the existing contract, with some amendments, rather than a more radical approach. There did not appear to have been any discussion about undertaking a contract with more than one authority, such as the ...Recycling Forum, which could have led to economies of scale and may have achieved the disposal of the Council’s depot.’

Source: Best value inspection report

126. Reviews often did not explore alternatives, preferring to modify earlier CCT type contracts that had been in place for a number of years. There has been little sharing of policy aims and objectives with potential contractors linked to invitations to explore alternative ways of delivering services, and the potential for contractor innovation has been limited from the outset.

RESERVATIONS ABOUT LONG-TERM CONTRACTS AND PFI

127. Waste services increasingly require a longer-term vision and significant investment but few BV reviews have addressed these. However a small number of local authorities have developed PFIs for waste services which are invariably longer-term. These include Surrey, Kirklees, Isle of Wight and South Gloucestershire and the last has been the subject of a BV inspection on the basis of the development of a twenty-five year integrated waste management contract.

128. However, twenty-five year contracts need critical consideration. For example, technology is constantly developing and it would be counter-productive if authorities were held to a contract for one method of disposal when a more environment-friendly and cost-effective method is subsequently developed. A number of PFIs in waste under consideration involve the building of an energy from waste plant. However, the House of Commons Select Committee would like to see incineration playing only a ‘moderate role’ in PFI bids, with PFI being used for long-term improvements in recycling and composting. ‘If not, we recommend that the role of PFI funding for waste management should be progressively reduced’ (ref. 9).

THE LACK OF MUTUAL INCENTIVES

129. As central government sets more prescriptive targets for waste services, for example recycling targets, local authorities will incline to move the risk associated with achieving targets on to the contractor. This increased risk is recognised by the private sector and such an approach is likely to mean higher costs for the local authority.

130. There are policies in place, often involving historically agreed guaranteed tonnages for disposal, which act as a deterrent to joint working. Many disposal contracts, most often for landfill, are established with a guaranteed tonnage level, with the waste disposal authority guaranteeing a certain tonnage to the disposal site operator. If the tonnage level is not met, penalties are imposed on the disposal authority in the form of a higher rate for disposal, which in turn is passed on to the waste collection authority.
There are also particular problems for those authorities which pay a levy to their joint waste disposal authority. One JWDA has eight bands of tonnage levels for waste for disposal over the life of their disposal contract, with a different price per tonne for each band. The levels reflect the need of the disposal contractor to know how much waste they will collect. If the districts produce less waste, the JWDA contractor charges more per tonne because of the failure to produce the guaranteed tonnage. Less waste has the same disposal cost. These penalties in turn increase the levy the waste disposal authority needs to raise from the districts. In addition, the cost of recycling credits to the waste disposal authority increases as less waste is disposed of, the total cost of waste disposal increases and the levy again increases, ignoring any increases in landfill tax. The system provides no incentives for waste collection authorities to increase recycling or promote waste minimisation.

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CLIENT AND CONTRACTOR(S)**

An important issue in any contracted service is the length of the chain between provider and customer. The public is unlikely to distinguish between the local authority and a private contractor and therefore the choice of supplier selected should include evidence of an effective interface with customers.

Early BV inspections have commented on the lack of communication between contractors responsible for discrete but related services. For example, in one authority the refuse collection and trade waste collections were contracted out to different companies. The refuse collectors have a ‘clear all’ policy, and clear all Zone 1 areas before 8am. The trade waste contractor waited until after 8am each day to clear trade waste, knowing that the other contractor would already have collected most of the rubbish, including trade waste. Similarly, contractors, supported by the local authority, should ensure their staff are aware of the objectives of the service as well as expectations and direct their efforts both to the operational tasks and the less tangible elements of the service (BOX 41).

**BOX 41 Borough Council**

‘Contractor’s staff who deliver the refuse collection service and street cleansing service, are not always aware of the level of importance that is attached by the public to the services they deliver on behalf of the Council. The public does not distinguish between the Council and the contractor and nor should they need to. The Council could and should do more to brief the contractor’s staff on key issues and Council policies. The contractor’s staff had a justified sense of pride in their work and this can only be enhanced by keeping them better informed.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*
ACTION TO OVERCOME BARRIERS – PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE THE WHOLE WASTE STREAM

WORKING WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Authorities will need to look outward if partnerships are to be effective. Project Integra in Hampshire has shown that these relationships can work successfully (BOX 42) and there are other positive examples of county councils developing joint working with districts and exploring the potential for more effective and efficient integrated waste management, at both officer and member level (BOXES 43, 44, 45 and 46).

BOX 42  Project Integra – Hampshire County Council

Project Integra is the name given to the integrated waste management strategy being implemented in Hampshire. Integra was established in 1993, when Hampshire County Council; the 11 district councils in Hampshire; Portsmouth and Southampton unitary authorities; and the private waste contractor, Hampshire Waste Services, adopted the integrated waste management strategy.

The strategy requires joint working between authorities, and Integra has established joint working arrangements through:

- a joint memorandum of understanding setting out the principles of the respective local authorities’ responsibilities and obligation supported by all Project Integra partners
- a tri-partite contract management agreement between Hampshire CC and the two unitary authorities
- a formal meeting structure to include representation by all Project Integra partners at officer and elected member level
- a proposal for a formal agreement to share income and risks from the sale of recyclables.
- a ‘Project Integra’ joint service plan agreement setting out detailed objectives and responsibilities for the coming year.
- a joint waste planning process establishing service needs and aspirations for the next five years.
- a joint promotional campaign focusing on waste minimisation and recycling.

The formal meetings between authorities are held at regular intervals. The constituent authorities discuss issues such as progress on best value reviews, new initiatives in recycling or waste minimisation, and share experiences and good practice. Cost and performance information is shared openly between authorities.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

1  http://www.integra.org.uk/about/main.html
**BOX 43 Warwickshire County Council**

Warwickshire Waste Forum was established in 1998 to address county-wide management issues. The relationship between county and districts has improved over the last 18 months, but there is still evidence of tensions, particularly where collection authorities have taken service decisions without considering the emerging waste strategy and in relation to Warwickshire’s Public Service Agreement.

Warwickshire has a strategy to reduce significantly landfill capacity. As a result, a number of West Midlands authorities are now putting together a regional strategy as their main option for disposal (Warwickshire’s landfill) will gradually diminish. Warwickshire is now looking to form a partnership with Coventry and Solihull, which currently use Coventry’s incinerator. Warwickshire is moving nearer to the minimum level of guaranteed tonnage of 50,000 tonnes in their ‘life of site’ contract for landfill. A partnership with Coventry and Solihull would provide the contractor at the incinerator with the guaranteed tonnage required as per the contract, without undermining Coventry and Solihull’s recycling efforts.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

**BOX 44 Bedfordshire County Council**

‘Both officers and members from the three district councils all report that the joint working arrangements now in place are much improved and are encouraged by the County Council’s commitment to working together. Improved relationships with districts have not yet delivered a working partnership to meet the challenges of delivering an improved and integrated service to residents within a two-tier authority setting. Key decisions and commitment to resources are yet to be made to allow targets for reducing landfill and increasing recycling to be met.

**Recommendation** – Set up a joint Member Waste Management Forum, comprising county and districts, with clear terms of reference to co-ordinate strategic waste management activities and jointly monitor progress against key targets in recycling and reducing landfill, and endeavour to agree a common refuse and recycling collection method with all waste collection authorities which improves performance against key strategic targets of increasing recycling and reducing landfill.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

**BOX 45 Welland Group**

Five rural councils (Harborough, Melton, Rutland, East Northamptonshire and South Kesteven) form the Welland Group, from four county areas. The Group recognises that the existing administrative boundaries have little bearing on the way that people live their lives in the area, and so the authorities are working together to promote the sub-regional area. The Group encompasses more than waste services, including market town regeneration, tourism planning, transport and housing strategies.

*Source: Audit Commission research*
BOX 46  West Devon Borough Council

‘There is some evidence of positive and constructive joint working across the county with Devon County Council and the other Devon districts, to promote recycling and waste minimisation. During the course of the inspection we saw a well-attended public ‘roadshow’ in Tavistock which aimed to raise awareness and promote recycling. It had been jointly organised by West Devon and Devon County Council. There is a county-wide forum where recycling officers from the districts and the county council meet to develop recycling activities.

Although at a county-level the recycling rate is high (23.4 per cent in 1999/00) there has been less progress on joint working across the county at a strategic level. There is no agreed county-wide waste management strategy. Although a draft was produced in 1996 it has still not been developed further. It is intended to develop a strategy but there are no clear timescales agreed for its production. A waste management and recycling joint panel does exist, which is a committee of elected members from the districts and county, who meet to co-ordinate recycling and waste management.’

Source: Best value inspection report

135. The reality is that it is quite possible for one contractor to run the whole of a waste management service and moderate collection and recycling as required. One relatively new unitary authority commenting on its range of recycling initiatives and increased recycling rate from 3 per cent to over 25 per cent in three years said, ‘It is important to say that some of these improvements would not have come about in an authority not responsible for waste collection and waste disposal.’ And one county area is actively considering such an approach (BOX 49).

BOX 47  Norfolk Waste Management Partnership

Norfolk Waste Management Partnership, comprising members and officers from each of the seven district councils and the county council, in a recent study examined the potential for a single service for waste in Norfolk. Early findings show that a single, unified waste service in a two-tier county would show significant efficiency, environmental and cost benefits. The conclusions reached in the report are:

- the achievement of strategic targets for waste management can best be achieved through a single service operated to best value principles.
- a single body with executive powers will be able to plan strategy and implement waste service operations more effectively than a non-executive voluntary grouping of authorities in a two-tier area.
- environmental benefits will be achieved through the overall co-ordination that a single service will apply to waste prevention, minimisation and recycling efforts and to the planning of transport routes for recyclable and waste materials.
- community outreach and ‘one-stop’ service delivery benefits will be enhanced by a single service for waste management.
- the delivery of waste management services through a single executive body would bring estimated financial savings in operational and management costs to Norfolk in the order of 12 per cent.
- the funding of waste services under a single executive body through the existing tax base or by the introduction of direct user charges, which are widely adopted internationally, should be examined through further study and consultation.’

Source: Audit Commission research

1 Further information can be found by visiting the Norfolk Waste Management Partnership website http://www.resource-not-waste.co.uk
136. Partnerships between counties and their districts can produce economies of scale. District council bring sites for glass are expensive as they may take only small volumes. Large amounts are required to make a profit from the sale of glass from recycling. Working together on an area basis, with, for example, joint investment and collection of all glass before selling, would be more efficient and economic than district councils selling small quantities alone (BOX 48). Similarly a number of authorities recycle aluminium cans. Cans require compression to ensure that the local tonnage pays. Investing in a source of compression between authorities may produce greater tonnage and therefore more income. Project Integra combine all the recyclables and sell as one producer on a larger scale.

**BOX 48  East Sussex County Council**

In East Sussex a full time post is partly funded by the recycling consortium, made up of East Sussex, the five districts and Brighton and Hove (a unitary authority), to manage a glass recycling contract for all the authorities. The collection contract for glass is held by Wealden DSO, which collects glass for the whole of the county. Under a separate arrangement Wealden has taken on the responsibility of selling the glass. The post also has a role in evaluating other recyclables and methods for collection.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

137. BV reviews by the waste disposal authority should reflect the realities of service operations for all affected parties, including working with the waste collection authorities to develop the optimum solution for all. Collection contracts may need to be re-let for a shorter length of time to ensure a fit with the waste disposal authority’s waste strategy and the contracts of the other district councils. Common contract renewal dates offer greater scope for joint working between authorities for refuse collection and recycling. Some authorities (for example Project Integra and Norfolk Waste Management Partnership) are looking in the longer-term for joint BV reviews between county and district and or unitary councils.

138. If the different tiers involved in waste management fail to address the potential for closer joint working and co-ordination, central government may deem that more radical approaches are needed. The recent report by the House of Commons Select Committee included the following recommendation; ‘measures must be taken to ensure greater co-operation between Waste Collection Authorities and Waste Disposal Authorities. Although the Government has now issued guidance for the drawing up of statutory Municipal Waste Management Strategies, we are concerned that these should be prepared and agreed as quickly as possible. If these strategies do not prove to be successful, the Government should give consideration to the use of single waste management authorities with responsibility for both collection and disposal’ (ref. 9).

**WORKING WITH VOLUNTARY GROUPS**

139. Local authorities have a key role in the improvement of the local environment (including Local Agenda 21) and as such have increasing contacts with various environmental groups and organisations. Inspections showed that at the overall authority level there were partnership frameworks for the area involving the voluntary sector, but at the specific service level these were less common. Nevertheless, there are examples of positive partnership initiatives with the voluntary sector (BOX 49).
BOX 49  London Borough of Bexley

Bexley is working with Respond (Thamesmead) Limited. Respond is a registered charity that runs as a business recycling furniture and white goods, predominantly in south-east London. Respond provided 13,784 items of furniture in 1999, and 60 per cent of referrals come from Social Services and health and welfare agencies. During 1999, it is estimated that 1,000 tonnes of recycled goods were diverted from landfill and regenerated to provide direct support to the community. The organisation provides work placements and employs 32 full-time staff. The organisation can ‘renovate’ housing and provide furniture and white goods in six days, which has helped local authorities considerably in the task of housing asylum seekers.

Source: Audit Commission research

140. Some authorities have involved representatives in the reviews, for example Friends of the Earth, while others have worked with partners to develop specific initiatives such as recycling. Early impressions are that there is considerable potential for closer involvement with the voluntary sector in developing quality waste services. Future BV reviews will need to demonstrate that consultation has included such groups and organisations and that possible partnerships have been explored fully.

WORKING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

141. Partnerships with the private sector are still at the formative stage but as part of the BV review process local authorities will need to explore the potential for such relationships including tapping into other local authorities with experiences in this area (BOXES 50 and 51).

BOX 50  London Borough of Brent

‘The relationship between the council and contractors who deliver the services is constructive and contact occurs at different levels within the organisations. The findings from the best value review were presented to members jointly by council officers and the contractors staff.’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 51  District Council

The Council wrote a new contract specification for letting its refuse collection and street cleansing contract, as a result of the best value review. Zone changes were made on the recommendation of the previous contractor, from two Zone 1 areas to eight. Council officers held one-to-one meetings with prospective contractors to answer any particular queries, and showed the contractors around the area to allow contractors to judge distances for the collection rounds and the distance to landfill. The Council also sent out a pre-qualification questionnaire, which asks the contractor about health and safety issues for example, which took away the need for this statutory information to be included in the tender. The contractors felt that in doing so the Council allowed them more time to consider the specification more fully.

Source: Audit Commission research

Further details at www.respondbank.co.uk
142. Concerns about guaranteed tonnages in disposal contracts have come about primarily because historically waste disposal authorities paid contractors per tonne for the amount of waste taken to disposal. East Sussex County Council has moved away from this to a more equitable system (BOX 52).

**BOX 52 East Sussex County Council**

East Sussex pays a management fee to its household waste recycling contractors instead of paying on tonnage. Therefore an increase in waste tonnage is not in the contractor’s interest. Paying management fees makes partnership arrangements easier as contractors are not disadvantaged for diverting waste away from landfill in the form of recycling. In addition contractors pay less on haulage costs as there is less waste to move, and contractors have a greater incentive to find or install recycling facilities. The lessons from this approach are that the contractor:

- has to give a rate per tonne in the tender for recycling (the management fee is to operate the site);
- has to give a rate per tonne for every tonne diverted from landfill, for example hard core; and
- has a target to hit for recycling and diversion from landfill.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*

143. Within waste management, over and above the direct contractual relationship with the private sector, there are other partnership opportunities which few have yet explored fully. The examples thrown up by BV inspection so far are mainly related to recycling and the outcomes flowing from MRFs (material recycling facilities) where the local authority has a specific arrangement for types of recyclables. For example, Project Integra has formed partnerships with the British Retail Council, Unilever and Coca-Cola, while Knowsley is working with Tarmac to explore the potential of disposing of hard products at Tarmac’s Liverpool facility.

**PROCUREMENT**

144. Local authorities will need to develop a procurement strategy, ensuring that it fits with the requirements of best value. A procurement strategy should provide objective criteria for the selection of suppliers and, in line with central government BV guidance, ensure ‘fair and open competition among potential service providers’. A failure to move from the predominantly ad hoc approaches identified at the BV inspections will leave authorities open to further and more acute criticism at inspection.

145. Future contracts for waste disposal need to explore potential partnership arrangements with the disposal contractor. The focus should be on an integrated system, with a contract where the contractor supports improvement in recycling rates. Payment bands for guaranteed levels of tonnages within a contract should be descending, not increasing.

146. In best value reviews for waste management, authorities will need to demonstrate that, as well as a robust analysis of their current problems and available resources, they have also considered the range of options for future procurement, including PFI. There are examples where the PFI option has been developed before clarifying the problems and the full range of options available. Whichever option is preferred, the service should have a mix of short-term and longer-term incentives in place reflecting a clear direction for the service, a vision of where they intend to be in 25 years and an element of flexibility to allow unanticipated external and internal change to be accommodated.
147. PFI, in particular, is a prolonged and resource-intensive process, but local authorities cannot afford to lose sight of the BV requirements. Contracts will need regular agreed reviews (at least every five years), provisions for consultation with users and other stakeholders, and robust and proven payment methods which properly accommodate penalty and deduction arrangements. Local authorities will also need to ensure that contracts reflect both its own corporate and service policies and objectives, and national targets for recycling and waste minimisation.

148. South Gloucestershire Council’s PFI received a favourable inspection including a particularly positive view of the arrangements for payments to the contractor (BOX 53).

**BOX 53 South Gloucestershire Council**

The contract payment mechanism has three key elements. They seek to encourage good performance by the contractor against the Council’s key recycling objectives; discourage poor performance of key operational services; and share efficiency gains with the Council.

**Encouraging good performance**

The main (unitary) payment provides financial incentives to:

- Increase levels of recycling, by providing for deductions from the annual payment if the actual agreed percentage of recovered material does not meet the agreed target for that year; and
- Increase levels of home composting, by providing for deductions from the annual payments if the tonnage of household waste composted at home does not meet the agreed target for that year.

The contractor retains income from sales of recyclable materials.

**Discouraging poor performance**

Cash deductions are made from the main payment for failure to meet operational performance objectives as set out in the contract’s Service Delivery Plan, based on a ‘points’ system. The severity of deduction is linked to:

- The importance of the performance issues – there are 42 ‘Non-Compliant Incidents’ (NCIs), many related to important user perspectives (for example missed collection of a refuse bin, missed bulky waste collection or late opening of a civic amenity site);
- ‘Escalators’ – if there are too many NCI defaults in a month, the NCI points are increased above a specific threshold; and
- Discouraging continuous serious default by daily financial deductions.

**Sharing efficiency gains with the Council**

If the contractor’s performance exceeds the agreed maximum target for recovery:

- The council receives a 50 per cent share of the Landfill Tax saving once the actual percentage of recovered waste exceeds 40 per cent, thus reducing the Council’s costs; and
- If the contractor generates excess profits (as agreed within the contract) the council is entitled to a proportion of these.

The key output targets are subject to review every 5 years. Thus, their use as the basis for encouraging good performance by the contractor will drive continuous improvement over the 25-year contract period. But the ‘set maximum’ target and efficiency saving mechanism mean that the Council limits its contractual payments to what it can afford.

*Source: Audit Commission fieldwork*
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CLIENT AND CONTRACTOR

149. To most people it is not important whether their council or a contractor provides their waste services. What they do care about is that any problems or potential complaints about the service can be addressed promptly. From the authority’s viewpoint, it should be clear who is to take action, who pays and that there is an effective recording of complaint and remedy. The worst scenario is where complaints pass through a number of systems (client and contractor) with the increased likelihood that they fall by the wayside before action is taken. The shorter the link the more likely it will be effective.

* * *

150. The next section discusses some specific issues identified at inspection which will need to be considered when undertaking a best value review. There are other waste management issues which may also need to be addressed, such as abandoned cars and graffiti, but inspection evidence in these areas is limited and no guidance has been developed at this time.
CHECKLIST – PARTNERSHIPS TO TACKLE THE WHOLE WASTE STREAM

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Have we considered and consulted the WCA/WDA/JWDA when developing our waste strategy?

Is the BV review programme co-ordinated with the WCA/WDA/JWDA’s review programme?

Have we involved the voluntary sector in our BV review?

Have we involved the private sector in our BV review?

Is there a memoranda of understanding between our authority and the WDA/WCA with:
   - clear terms of reference?
   - regular formal meetings?
   - evidence of action?

Have we considered partnership initiatives with the voluntary sector?

PROCUREMENT

Do we have a procurement strategy? If so, does it:
   - have objective criteria for the selection of suppliers?
   - ensure fair and open competition among suppliers?

Does the BV review for waste reflect our procurement strategy?

Have we considered a range of options in our BV review for future procurement?

Do our future procurement strategies contain a mix of short and long-term incentives in place?

Have we considered alternative providers and suppliers for the waste service? If so, have we taken account of:
   - cost?
   - quality?
   - confidence in deliverability?

If our waste service has been outsourced is the contractor closely involved in:
   - service development?
   - day-to-day operational changes?
   - training and development of staff?

Have we considered a range of alternative methods when re-letting contracts?

Have we considered links to the WDA’s developing strategy when re-letting contracts?

Have we considered the impact of our policy decisions on WCAs/WDA?

Have we considered sharing our policy aims and objectives with potential contractors?

Have we given potential contractors the opportunity to explore alternative ways of delivering services?

Have we considered sharing the risk associated with meeting targets with the contractor?

(WDAs/JWDAs only) Is the focus for future disposal contracts on an integrated system where the contractor supports an improvement in recycling rates?
(WDAs/JWDAs only) Are future payment bands for guaranteed levels of tonnage within a contract descending?

(WDAs/JWDAs only) Does our BV review reflect the realities of service operations for all affected parties?

Do longer, (25-30 year), contracts contain:

- a clear direction for the service?
- a vision of where we want to be in 25-30 years?
- an element of flexibility to allow for unanticipated external and internal change to be accommodated?
- regularly agreed reviews (at 5-year intervals)?
- provision for consultation with users and other stakeholders?
- proven payment methods which properly accommodate penalty and deduction arrangements?

Do contracts reflect:

- the authority’s corporate and service policies and objectives?
- national targets for recycling and waste minimisation?

Have we considered common contract renewal dates to allow greater scope for joint working?
As well as the main strategic themes developed in the previous section, there are a number of specific issues relating to improvement in waste services which may need to be considered as part of the best value review and in any service improvement programme. This section considers both engagement with users and some general operational aspects of waste management which have been identified during inspections and other fieldwork. There will be others which may need to be included but significant evidence and examples have not yet been identified. The main areas covered here are:

- engagement with users;
- refuse collection; and
- street cleansing.

**ENGAGEMENT WITH USERS**

The essence of best value is to improve services and those best placed to provide information on the quality of services are the users. As well as specific BV consultation, local authority services will need mechanisms to help users to contact and find out more about the service, and to register complaints when it is failing. Local authorities should be able to demonstrate what action has resulted from complaints and how suggestions for improving services from any and every source are taken on board.

**CONTACTING THE SERVICE**

Many local authorities have been considering the quality of citizen access to services, and there have already been a number of BV reviews and inspections in this area. There are, however, some issues which are particularly relevant to waste service users. For example, there should be a contact number on all waste vehicles, civic amenity sites and bring sites (BOX 54).

**BOX 54 Metropolitan Borough Council**

‘...publicises its complaints line widely – but has not updated its telephone number on vehicles and plant in some instances which could lead to public confusion about which number to ring. And some of the numbers ... have not been used for five years.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

It is essential that information is accessible as far as possible, and to this end reception or enquiry desks should have access to copies of collection rounds and cleaning schedules to allow full information to be given to members of the public. Brent has also placed copies of schedules on its internet site.
There are further examples in districts where the refuse collection contractor is required to inform the council if collections are late or unlikely to be completed that day. This allows the authority to ensure members of the public chasing this up are given the latest available information and an explanation if possible. In at least one authority the local ward member is also informed of the position.

COMPLAINTS

Robust complaints systems are essential for providing the local authority with information on public concerns, whether it is meeting perceived needs and what possible action it might take to improve the current service. Many authorities seek to record every complaint received to ensure common problems are picked up and, as far as possible, addressed within available resources. Sound IT systems are important in ensuring complaints are used constructively and it is weaknesses here which are often the reason for less successful approaches. Most importantly, patterns of complaints are valuable sources of information on service delivery and there should be mechanisms to ensure that these are analysed and possible changes to services explored (BOXES 55, 56, 57 and 58).

BOX 55 Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The Council has recently introduced a call centre to deal with, among others, all refuse collection and street cleaning calls. This service began in November 2000 and is still developing. It acts as a single point of contact for the public and all service requests are sent to officers electronically, creating a sustainable and speedier response. The call centre opening times will be extended to give access until six o’clock at night...’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 56 Metropolitan Borough Council

The Council has installed an automated voicemail system that provides one number for waste control. Three officers answer calls, but when all lines are busy, or after hours, a voicemail system is introduced. The three officers have responsibility through a rotation system for retrieving messages from the voice box. All calls are then logged using customised software under the complainant’s address. This way, the authority is able to monitor repeat calls, and identify issues that arise most often in specific areas. Each call is coded by the nature of the call, grouped, and sent out twice daily to the relevant contractor service or in-house service manager for action.

Staff operating the system receive faxes from the contractor for any problems experienced with refuse collection or street cleansing, for example mechanical breakdown or access problems, or if a bin has not been put out or the bin is too heavy. With this system both the contractor and the officers know exactly what needs to be actioned. At the moment, the contractor does not have access to the system, although the authority is currently looking at this option.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork
BOX 57  Borough Council

‘Response to service failure is pragmatic rather than strategic. Evidence from the log of customer complaints shows that problems are dealt with, usually promptly, after they occur, but that no analysis is made of patterns of recurring complaints to identify and address underlying problems and inform service development. Both the client and the DSO are aware that the current arrangements for dealing with service requests and complaints from customers are not properly integrated and involve the duplication of activity.’

Source: Best value inspection report

BOX 58  Watford Borough Council

‘The Council has a comprehensive system for receiving complaints and reports from the public of problems with litter. These are collected centrally … and passed to street cleaning staff for attention. Complaints are monitored on a monthly basis, and the volume of complaints assessed. However, there was no evidence that this information was used to refine the service or change patterns of working to prevent future problems. Again, education and enforcement have a positive part to play in driving improvement.’

Source: Best value inspection report

157. It is essential that there is a clear line of responsibility for dealing with complaints. It is not important with whom the responsibility rests, client or the contractor, so long as it is clear. Failings in this area are often the result of the contractor’s lack of access to the council’s IT system. The complaint is recorded but never reaches the contractor who is then unable to remedy matters due to lack of awareness that there is an issue.

158. Complaints, especially in refuse collection, are often the result of a lack of knowledge on what the local authority will and will not do. For example, how many bags will the authority collect over and above that in the wheeled bin? Local authorities need to ensure that policies and details of services provided, especially for refuse collection are both clear and widely disseminated.

FEEDBACK

159. Although members of the public can be quick to complain, equally they can be positive in drawing attention to areas where improvements could be made at little or no cost to the contractor or council. Users must be the primary source for information on service quality and important contributors to the achievement of continuous improvement. In trying to improve services, authorities will face conflicting tensions between achieving BV targets and accommodating user needs and expectations. A local authority may, from the best of intentions, make changes to the service but users perceive the changes as undermining service quality.

160. Local authorities should establish mechanisms by which service users can periodically flag up their concerns and proposals for changes. There should be a transparent approach to considering such comments and suggestions, but also an explicit recognition of the implications for resources and other statutory requirements and targets.
REFUSE COLLECTION

161. Local authority user surveys frequently show refuse collection as the most important service provided by local authorities and, generally, achieve high levels of user satisfaction. Residents want a regular and reliable refuse collection service. However inspectors have found that there are considerable differences between the quality of service received by people in different authorities and in the additional services available.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

162. A number of best value reviews include discussions on the possible change from bag collections to wheeled bins. Any consequent change in collection method impacts on matters such as contractual arrangements, the budget, staffing levels and recycling performance. Currently wheeled bins are used by just under half of waste collection authorities in England and Wales with the rest using plastic sacks or some other means of containment. There are arguments both for and against each method, but there is no evidence that the method is a major factor in any user or external assessment of the quality of the service.

163. Few BV reviews to date contain any discussion of the positives and negatives of the different methods of collection and their relevance to local circumstances. An analysis of costs and benefits associated with the different methods is required to make an informed decision about the direction of the service and its delivery.

164. A number of studies have shown that using wheeled bins with increased capacity leads to an increase in the amount of waste generated. One area highlighted specifically at inspections concerned policies allowing the topping up of wheeled bins. Such a policy allows residents to ‘top up’ the bin if it is put out for collection less than full. But such policies do not promote waste minimisation especially as most people were topping up with green waste rather than going to a civic amenity site or recycling centre.

165. One option is to limit the amount of waste collected from individual properties. The Audit Commission in 1997 recommended smaller wheeled bins while others have discussed the possibility of limiting the number of sacks collected. One consequent problem concerns the picking up of bags left alongside wheeled bins. If they are left people may report this as a missed collection with an adverse effect on measured performance and remedial action may be necessary. It could create additional litter or even be fly tipped.

166. Clear all policies tend to result in all refuse being collected first time to avoid a return visit or potential litter. There is a debate as to whether ‘clear all’ policies conflict with waste minimisation, as the householder has no incentive to minimise or recycle the amount of waste they generate if the council will remove it all. These are not easy areas to manage, but the BV review should contain evidence that there is a robust case for the authority’s proposed future approach and it does not just represent the continuation of what has always happened.

167. There are a number of collection options: kerbside, edge of curtilage, back door, or point of storage. Most authorities have edge of curtilage or kerbside collections where the onus is placed on the householder to put their rubbish out in time for the collection round. However, some authorities have a point of storage collection where residents determine where to put their rubbish for collection. Both service managers and operatives see point of
storage collections as adding time to collection rounds, especially in rural areas. Refuse operatives showed particular frustration around point of storage collections. One driver of a crew that had a 35-mile round said, ‘one resident reported that we had missed his rubbish so we had to return to pick it up. We still couldn’t find the bags and were again sent back. We eventually found one bag under his canoe…sometimes people put them inside garages with the door shut.’ There was no requirement for the resident to leave the refuse in a place where it could easily be seen, and this was reflected in the contract specification with the responsibility falling on the contractor and, almost certainly, provided for in the contract price. Back door collections similarly are considered as likely to result in higher levels of missed collections (BOXES 59 and 60).

**BOX 59  Borough Council**

‘The back door, black sack collection method for domestic refuse is labour intensive and can be problematic, especially in areas where the rear of properties are accessed via narrow passageways…staff reported problems with poor lighting, uneven surfaces, dog fouling and dumped rubbish in these passageways.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

**BOX 60  Metropolitan Borough Council**

‘The Council attributes the high missed collection rate to the fact that they provide a back door collection service and access is sometimes restricted resulting in a missed collection.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

168. A number of authorities now monitor the presentation of bins for collection in response to complaints of missed bins. For example, one metropolitan authority, after receiving repeat complaints of missed bins from one resident, monitored when the resident was presenting his bin. It transpired that the resident continually presented the bin after the collection round had passed. The authority then contacted the householder with their evidence. On the other hand, Brent monitors how the bins are presented for collection to ensure that operatives are replacing bins in the correct place. Some councils have made use of ‘emergency response teams’, where a team of operatives is deployed specifically to pick up ‘missed bins’ or fly tips, to prevent the crew returning and delaying the remainder of the round.

169. A separate access issue concerns access problems for refuse vehicles in urban areas caused by on the road parking. High missed collection rates are attributed to the lack of access to roads, often whole streets; ‘heavy parking and narrow streets frequently restrict refuse collection vehicle access,’. For example Brent has problems with cars parking in the areas of free parking in the south east of the authority; ‘missed bin collections are ...primarily a result of access difficulties for refuse collection vehicles’. It is seeking to overcome these problems by introducing smaller refuse collection vehicles and establishing controlled parking zones, where cars are not allowed to park at the specific times of refuse collection rounds, allowing access to the refuse wagon. These have been most effective where the police have supported the enforcement, but a number of authorities have complained that local police will not support their enforcement policy.
170. Roads within new housing developments are often not designed for refuse wagons, with the streets being too narrow. Most authorities now stipulate in planning, that new build should be designed to allow room for a receptacle for waste, at the property. They will also need to stipulate that streets are of a minimum width to allow refuse vehicles room to manoeuvre. Some refuse collection contractors have also flagged up the impact of property growth and newly occupied housing on collection arrangements. There can be a problem where authorities only monitor properties annually, and therefore inform the contractor annually of newly occupied properties. As a result contractors may miss collections due to being unaware the house is occupied. There may also be an impact on the number of rounds required to remove the rubbish.

171. One of the most widespread problems raised at inspections concerned bank holiday collections. If refuse collectors do not work on bank holidays, the waste for those households whose collection round falls on that day will not be collected. The majority of authorities arrange to collect on an appropriate alternative day. However many residents, in consultation, raised the disruption by the change in the day of collection as a major issue (BOX 61).

**BOX 61** Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council

‘People complained about the disruption caused to Monday collections by bank holidays. This feedback was used in the decision to set-up a four day collection service borough-wide, which has eliminated Monday as a collection day to prevent problems with nearly all the bank holidays.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

172. Where drivers’ hours have been reduced there have been difficulties especially in rural areas where the vehicles are required to be out as long as possible to complete high mileage rounds and take the waste collected to disposal. This is especially acute where landfill site closing times are earlier than the end of the refuse collection working day. For county councils, waste transfer station opening times ideally need to accommodate the arrangements for all the constituent districts even if they do not treat bank holidays and Christmas the same. A number of authorities have overcome this problem by working with the trade unions to introduce bank holiday working, thus providing a year round service with no disruption to the householder.

173. A few inspections have commented on the impact on services of existing bonus schemes (BOX 62) and also the move to single status. To date, the evidence is minimal but BV reviews will nevertheless need to consider whether this represents an issue for the authority.

**BOX 62** Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The refuse collection bonus system, based on 100 per cent of wages, and a ‘task and finish’ philosophy, drives performance at the expense of quality... Because the system is based on efficiency rather than quality control a high number of missed collections occurs...the desire to quickly complete a collection round has contributed to errors weighing vehicles at the waste to energy incineration plant.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*
TRADE WASTE

174. There have been limited references to trade waste in BV inspection reports to date other than the full inspection at Waltham Forest. There are clearly issues in this area for effective waste management but the current evidence base is thin. Where waste collection vehicles are used to collect both trade and household waste there is an incentive to under-declare the amount of trade waste to reduce disposal costs. East Sussex may have avoided this by asking that all trade waste brought for disposal is in designated trade vehicles. A registration system is in place where the waste disposal authority logs the vehicles bringing in waste in mixed household/trade waste loads. The county offers a reduced rate to contractors for waste delivered in dedicated trade vehicles, thus providing an incentive for district council contractors to declare commercial waste brought for disposal.

STREET CLEANSING

175. Street cleansing and general cleanliness of the environment figure highly in surveys on comparative importance of local government services, but as with refuse collection, the differences between authorities in terms of standards of cleanliness are considerable.

FREQUENCY OR OUTPUT BASED SPECIFICATIONS?

176. The EPA Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse recommended that authorities use output based cleansing of streets as opposed to frequency based although there are strong arguments for both. Frequency based cleansing tends to be popular as residents see sweepers at regular intervals. However, the sweepers may be cleaning streets that do not require such a level of cleaning and some authorities prefer to target resources at litter hotspots. Authorities that have changed to output cleaning have had to overcome public perceptions of service reductions. In these circumstances the authority will need to publicise changes with explanations to ensure the public is aware that although some are not being swept as frequently, on the whole standards are being maintained.

MONITORING PERFORMANCE

177. Some authorities actively involve residents in monitoring the standards of street cleanliness. In Brent, residents are encouraged to work alongside council monitoring officers as they inspect the streets. In Knowsley, residents also help with the monitoring. Residents are given a copy of the street cleansing schedule and cleanliness standards and are invited to contact the council if their street fails to meet the required standard.

178. Monitoring officers in Brent use handheld computers to record their street inspections, enabling officers to inform contractors when streets are not up to standard but also when streets do not need cleaning. Not all authorities, however, are so proactive. Some operatives highlighted the lack of communication between monitors and sweepers. In one, the sweeper had to wait for paperwork to reach him via the contractor before taking action on the inspection report. One monitoring officer kept a sack and a brush in his car and if he came across litter would pick it up, rather than reporting and instructing the sweeper to return to the street.

179. Another issue around monitoring arose in authorities that use a computer to select at random a percentage of streets to inspect as part of contract monitoring. In rural
authorities in particular this caused a problem where the contractor has to return to remote parts of the authority, away from the cleansing schedule. This was seen as not being cost effective and put a strain on the sweeper trying to complete their schedule. Similarly sweepers were often pulled off their schedules to rectify complaints. Some authorities had attempted to overcome this by using a ‘hit squad’ or an emergency ‘mobile’ response team. (for instance, South Gloucestershire).

HOTSPOTS

180. Litter hotspots in most authorities are outside fast food outlets, schools and on private ground. Councils can designate private ground a Litter Control Area where the council can take a view that the presence of litter is detrimental to amenities of the area and is likely to continue being so. Occupiers are then required to keep the land clear of litter and refuse. Reality checks during inspections highlighted many areas of private land where litter caused a real problem; however, none of the authorities had designated Litter Control Areas.

181. Similarly, local authorities can issue Street Litter Control Notices to commercial or retail premises to prevent accumulation of litter on streets in the vicinity of the premises. This generally covers premises such as fast food outlets, petrol stations, betting shops, and places of entertainment. The authority can specify an area up to 100 metres along the street on either direction to be kept free from litter. Again there were no instances of authorities using this power, although litter hotspots were identified on many inspections around fast food outlets. Authorities cannot use Street Litter Control Notices around schools, and some authorities have tried to work with schools to educate students not to drop litter. There is mixed evidence as to the effectiveness of this approach.

AREA TEAMS

182. A number of authorities are moving to integrated service teams to target problem areas. Leeds is moving towards a single team approach for the city centre. Knowsley is using an approach with area teams working in housing estates and town centres, based on the recognition that different areas in an authority require different methods of cleansing. The authority has empowered those teams to make the decision as to what method of cleansing is best for that area, and have recognised the need to change frequency of cleansing depending on specific circumstances. Team leaders have the responsibility to make the decisions and ‘leave supervisors to do the paperwork’ (BOX 63).
BOX 63  Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Integrated services are being employed in area teams, to cover grounds maintenance and street cleansing activities. The teams are community based, often living in that particular community. This has enforced a sense of loyalty to the operatives by the people who live in the community. This approach was piloted in the Tower Hill area of Knowsley in 1998 and has over time improved accountability and ownership within the community and operatives for issues relating to their environment. It has in addition, improved the cleanliness of the area. Since the pilot commenced, it has become apparent that expectations have risen and that the public now expect better services from the Council.

The Council has made efficiency savings from adopting this type of integrated approach within the Tower Hill area, as residents take more responsibility for their environment. Most of the savings have been reinvested back into the operations, by way of improving the mechanisation within the services. Knowsley’s vision for the future is for a multi-skilled and fully integrated environmental team (grounds maintenance, street cleansing and highways maintenance), delivering services on an area basis and who are accountable for performance through the community area forums. The added benefits to this approach are the opportunities provided to the employees in acquiring different skills and undertaking other roles. The training and qualifications for this are being provided in the form of NVQ training and assessment. The increased ownership and pride for the area, has lead to employees becoming more involved in extra-curricular activities e.g. school governors, child mentors and community initiatives.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

FLY TIPPING

183. Fly tipping is an increasing problem in many authorities but many fail to address it effectively. Fly tipping is generally not a priority for contractors where the refuse collection contract does not include deductions for failing to meet targets for the removal of fly tips. Contractors, unless instructed to the contrary, will spend more time and resources on those parts of the service where deductions will be made if they fail to meet targets.

184. At one authority the refuse operatives radioed in fly tips they spotted on their rounds, to the council. However at one district council, the inspector visits the site and photographs the tip to ensure the fly tip exists. The environmental health department then inspects the tip and issues an instruction to the contractor to pick up the fly tip and monitor the date that it is cleared. This authority has not been able to achieve their target of collecting fly tips within four working days.

185. The use of full time ‘hit’ squads to move fly tips, dead animals or asbestos is one option which some are considering, but for districts these rapid response teams can be costly. It may be more cost effective for teams to work across authorities rather than pick up a single fly tip on each outing.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

186. There is a wide range of other initiatives which local authorities are taking forward when seeking to improve services within given resources. This study, given its time constraints, was only able to delve into a small sample of these (BOX 64). But there are many others which local authorities should try to identify and consider their applicability to their circumstances.
BOX 64  Some other good practice initiatives

- Main roads are swept before 8am, before many people go to work, creating an immediate impression that streets are clean.
- Litter bins treated as Zone 1 and emptied within 1 hour, including 5 metres radius.
- Service heads attend resident association meetings.
- Combining county weed killing with similar district council service.
- Rotas for street cleansing are held at reception/one stop shop to enable an immediate response to be given to enquiries.
- Parish litter pickers – the district council pays a small remuneration and it reduces down time travelling to villages in large rural areas.
- Using offenders on community service in street cleansing – Helping Hands at Leeds and Wirral.

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork
SECTION 6: BEST VALUE REVIEWS IN WASTE

THE CHALLENGE

187. The various functions covered by waste management have been among the most popular topics for early best value reviews, but inspectors (and auditors in their audit of the annual BV Performance Plans) have commented that review programmes often seem to be based on internal management structures, rather than on the links between activities. For example, where recycling is managed by environmental health it has been excluded from a review of waste services. The BV review is a key stage in improving services, yet many have ignored important factors such as user perspectives, working with partners and considering alternative approaches to service provision.

188. From the outset, it is critical to ensure a robust scope to the review, clarity over its objectives and to agree availability of resources for action based on the findings. The scope of a BV review is important in focusing the review team’s time and effort on the problems and reaching appropriate outcomes. BV reviews should tackle the most important problems for a local community, with review teams being clear about the problem to which they are seeking to find solutions before they begin.

189. Reviews to date have covered both narrow service activities (for example trade waste) and wide ranging combinations (such as cleanliness of the environment). Some have combined waste services with other ‘visible services’ such as ground maintenance and public conveniences where there is some link, possibly contractual. Others have combined recycling with broader environmental and LA 21 type reviews. There were also those with precise terms of reference covering only one element of waste management, for instance refuse collection or street cleansing. Inspectors are increasingly supporting the view that reviews should take a whole stream approach, that is cover the whole waste stream from generation, to collection, recycling and disposal. Some authorities have included street cleansing within this scope, whereas others have found it more practical to incorporate their street cleansing function within a wider street scene review. BV reviews should be as wide as practical rather than breaking down services into smaller elements (Boxes 65, 66 and 67).

BOX 65  London Borough

‘The Council originally intended to review the civic amenity site along with the refuse/recycling bank service but decided that this would be too complicated at that time and that a speedier solution to the perceived weaknesses within the domestic refuse service [was needed]. We feel some opportunity has been lost in terms of cost effectiveness and challenge by not including all aspects of waste management, i.e. street cleansing and waste disposal as well.’

Source: Best value inspection report
'We consider that the authority missed a major opportunity to include all of its waste management services in this review. The narrow scope of the review, combined with poor application of the four Cs means that the best value review will not drive improvement in this service.'

Source: Best value inspection report

The review had a narrow focus, concentrating on street cleaning rather than the public focus of street environment performance.'

Source: Best value inspection report

It is important, however, to reiterate that inspectors are inspecting the service and its potential for improvement and not the review as a stand-alone document. Reviews may be followed by best value inspections by the Audit Commission. Some authorities have wrongly, therefore, seen their reviews as exercises to satisfy inspectors, rather than to improve services, and have focused on lengthy and meticulous documentation of the processes followed in reviews. However, inspectors will be asking two key questions – ‘How good is the service?’ and ‘Is it likely to improve?’ In other words, they are examining the service and its potential for improvement and not the review document. The review should therefore, be outcome not process driven.
The Audit Commission in its publication *Stepping up a Gear* identifies four key factors which are critical to driving forward service improvement (ref. 17):

- ownership of problems and willingness to change;
- a sustained focus on what matters;
- the capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement; and
- integration of best value into day-to-day management.

Based on early inspection evidence, these hold true for waste management and will need to be addressed when considering the potential barriers to improvement in this area and the action required to overcome them.
FULL ENGAGEMENT OF ELECTED MEMBERS

192. Elected members have a critical role in addressing the inspection question, “Is the service likely to improve?” They are key to the delivery of quality services and the achievement of national targets; as part of, and in scrutinising BV reviews and in agreeing and monitoring any plan for improvement. In some local authorities, however, they have been reluctant to support best value fully and have given lukewarm responses to best value reviews. In some cases officers have had to wait until after elections before taking forward proposals for an integrated waste management strategy. Delays such as these carry with them significant resource implications.

193. A relatively common issue concerned the extent of engagement of elected members in the BV review process. Significant involvement in reviews can however make considerable demands of members’ time. From a practical point of view, a common problem is the low level of attendance by members at BV review meetings. Members found it difficult to attend review meetings during the working day because of other work commitments. To ensure full participation by members, an agreed timetable of meetings is required. One approach would be for members and officers to agree best value review protocols, with defined roles and responsibilities, and a clear timetable and process for discussion and decisions.

194. In some local authorities, as a consequence of the changes to local government structures, member involvement in best value reviews has often been limited to cabinet members. Remaining members have been left with a feeling of exclusion and loss of influence. In contrast one authority has positively allocated non-cabinet members to take part in specific BV reviews.

NARROW APPROACHES TO THE BEST VALUE REVIEW PROCESS

195. Many local authorities have included the ‘4Cs’ in their reviews; however inspections suggest that often they are not connected, but seen as processes in their own right. There is a reactive response to the ‘4Cs’ rather than proactive, that is, the review has been carried out and written around the ‘4Cs’ rather than using compare, consult, compete and challenge as integral parts of the review process. The ‘4Cs’ should be used as a framework for improving the service.

196. Although benchmarking clubs pre-date best value, its advent has led to an increase in their number, but the evidence suggests their value so far has been, at best, mixed. Inspection evidence demonstrates that there is no strong culture of sharing information between authorities, and even beacon councils do not always respond positively to enquiries from other local authorities around cost information. Few BV reviews contained evidence of shared information with near neighbours, although some authorities are looking to complete joint BV reviews with neighbours, for example a county council and its district councils. Similarly there is little evidence of local authorities making comparisons with the private or the voluntary sector. This may not always be easy to obtain but in most cases there is no evidence that this has even been considered.

197. Interviews with union representatives and staff at inspected authorities, showed that they had often not been included in the review, although they felt they had their own perspective to add to the process.
LIMITED USER INVOLVEMENT

198. The essence of best value is to improve services and those best placed to provide information on the quality of services are the users and the wider public. Although, the majority of BV reviews contained data from user consultations and surveys, many did not include information on how the results of the surveys could be used to achieve service improvement. Few authorities so far have gone beyond the measuring of satisfaction levels to a more interactive engagement on the issues which impact on people and the wider community.

WEAK PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

199. Inspectors, in forming a view on the capacity for improvement of any service, will expect to see in place a robust and effective performance management framework. This should include continuous monitoring against operational and financial targets, as well as an annual performance review to consider identified achievements and failures and to inform the various planning processes for subsequent years. Performance management should add value to the process; otherwise there is the risk of it becoming a routine bureaucratic exercise (BOX 68).

BOX 68 Performance management

‘The management of performance within the department is weak. Contract management is bureaucratic with no routine performance management at a senior level. If new approaches to service delivery are to be introduced, then performance management will be key to assessing success or failure. We consider this to be a key area for change.

The staff have no performance management targets. Without targets and regular appraisals, the staff have no expectations about what standards are expected of them and thus no framework for achieving common standards and quality.

A great deal of information is widely available, but it is not being used in a systematic way to improve performance, for example through the complaints system and the different performance levels of operative teams.’

* * *

‘The Council has also introduced a performance management system which links the corporate aims with business plans. Performance against targets is reviewed every six months at member and officer level. The relevant Committee is responsible for managing performance, but the newly established Policy, Performance and Regeneration Department has a brief to identify where performance is consistently failing against target.’

* * *

‘Recommendation: Improve performance management systems – systems need to be used actively to identify problem areas and manage performance to ensure targets are met. The potential for new systems to provide better management information about performance trends should be exploited.’

Source: Best value inspection reports

200. Early BV inspections have produced little evidence of sound performance management frameworks with the resulting conclusion that there was little capacity for service improvement under current arrangements. Training and development needs have been conspicuous by their absence in BV reviews and during inspections, although one inspected authority, Knowsley, provides NVQ training for its operatives.
LACK OF LINKS BETWEEN RELATED PLANS

201. Many local authorities are working on MWM strategies, but the fit with the BV review has not yet been addressed widely. Overall, few of the BV reviews reflected the need for and contents of the Recycling Plan, LA 21, the Waste Local Plan or community plans. The relevance of recycling plans to the future of waste management appears self-evident, but reference to them within BV reviews is limited.

ACTION TO OVERCOME BARRIERS – BEST VALUE REVIEWS IN WASTE

TAKING THE WIDER VIEW

202. Scoping of a review should look at all aspects of the delivery and shaping of the service, especially as perceived by users, examining which stages are adding cost without adding value. For example, a small number of authorities have found it more logical to review street cleansing as part of a street scene or highways review (BOX 69).

BOX 69  Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

‘The Council has reviewed a wide scope of services which followed directly from concerns expressed by local people about their environment. It has addressed difficult areas and responded to consultation. The review was led by an officer outside this service area and a further external challenge was provided by the Tidy Britain Group who conducted a major consultation exercise on behalf of the Council. However, alternative delivery options could have been more rigorously considered. The wide-ranging scope of this review is more likely to deliver the kind of substantial improvements required by best value.’

Source: Best value inspection report

203. There are some examples of early BV reviews of waste management containing comment on the fit with LA21, and it is this wider fit with other plans and initiatives that should be reflected in the review. One starting point for BV reviews will increasingly be the community strategy. BV reviews should be based on outcomes for which community plans provide the focus.

MORE INCLUSIVE APPROACHES

204. Ensuring that members are up to speed about the issues involved in waste management is imperative to delivering change. All members as far as possible should be involved in best value working groups and reviews. Feedback has shown that member involvement helps them to understand the service and the statutory requirements. In Brent, members were involved from the very beginning of the refuse collection and street cleansing review, with each party nominating a member to take part. In addition an independent chair steered the review and the subsequent report through the political process. The members’ role was made clear at the beginning of the process to avoid the review becoming a political tool. In Warwickshire, a Members Steering Group with cross-party membership was established for each BVR. The chair of the scrutiny committee is never a member of the controlling party.
205. Members in some authorities, in supporting the BV review and decisions to change the method of refuse collection and strengthen recycling schemes, have been faced with options unlikely to be universally popular. The switch to fortnightly collection of non-recyclables is an increasingly common but difficult option. Nevertheless, members have supported the policy decision through a mixture of education and discussion, but accepting that resident dissatisfaction with the arrangements needs positive and skilled management (BOX 70).

**BOX 70  Borough Council**

‘Some leading members signed up to BV and are seeking to achieve real improvements in services, but not all members are of like mind. There was a mixed member message as to whether there was support for changes. Without such support, officers are not being offered effective leadership. Members need to be clear about the levels of improvement they wish to see and the resources they are prepared to commit to ensure the council meets national targets.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

206. Warwickshire has a regular reporting cycle (every two months) for the Members Steering Group for their BVR. Attendance problems were overcome by the BVR officer reporting to the Chair on who has attended the steering group meetings.

207. The BV review at Rutland had member involvement, but the officers are regarded as those best placed to understand the impact of policy. One councillor made a specific statement against members attempting to manage, that ‘... they are here to direct. Leave the officers to manage the service’. Rutland also has an Environmental Forum (which forms part of LA21) who consult on environmental matters (mainly recycling and composting). It is a formal body established by the council that allows pressure groups and the public to have their say. This allows public opinion to inform the council in developing services, and promotes local ownership. This is in contrast to the inspectors’ comments at another authority where there had been little contact with staff or local people, ‘The Council had not adopted best value tools for reviewing these services and had not talked to local people or staff about ideas for changing the services.’, ‘And no targets for the staff to make sure the service got better.’
PARTICIPATION IN THE REVIEW

208. A number of authorities included representatives from the workforce in the review steering group encouraging further ownership of the resulting actions. At Knowsley MBC officers described how the BV review has given the authority the capacity to involve the workforce in decisions, and stressed the benefits of collaboration and communication with operatives. At one district council it was quite clear that officers often did not fully appreciate the changes their directives would mean in practice. Involving operatives in the review process through consultation and also through representation on steering groups enables the practicalities of, for example, changing collection systems to be worked through, easing any changes to the service.

209. BV review steering groups should not be restricted to service managers and officers involved within the waste service. There is a need for a real external challenge. Some authorities have involved an external party, both from outside the department and from outside the authority. Such reciprocal arrangements have often been to the benefit of both parties.

210. Authorities may find it useful to involve the finance department at an early stage in the best value review process. Brent and Warwickshire both have a structure of devolved budgets, where the departments manage their own financial arrangements with support from finance in a partnership arrangement. Finance officers at Warwickshire were involved in the BVR and had an important role assisting in the costing of new initiatives identified in the review.

USERS

211. The review should consider user surveys and consultation exercises to establish areas for potential improvements to service provision. An awareness of the user perspective of the service is essential if improvement is to be developed. All local authority services should also have mechanisms in place to allow users to contact and find out more about the service. They should be able to register complaints when services are considered to be failing and be informed about the action which has resulted from complaints and other feedback. Local authorities must be prepared to take on board suggestions for improving services from any and every source.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

212. The main BV PIs for waste management cover cost of collection per household, recycling rates and numbers of missed bins. Comparisons on costs figure prominently in inspection reports, but there are some questions over the robustness of the comparisons, because of, for example, the differing methods of refuse collection and variances in sparsity of population. Local authorities will need to demonstrate that the relevant costs have been analysed and valid comparisons made to give an indicative cost performance. The appropriate explanations such as deprivation levels can then be argued in the review.

213. Local authorities will also need to show how benchmarking has been applied to the various elements of the waste services to ensure robust comparisons are made. There are, however, some examples where there are formal arrangements in place to promote regular meetings at which members and or officers share experiences and compare practices, such as Project Integra and HTCOA (Hertfordshire Technical Chief Officers’ Association’s Waste Services Committee).
214. The recently established Waste Industry National Training Organisation (WINTO) was founded to make progress in delivering higher skills and training in the waste management industry. Their First Annual Report highlights the need to accelerate and broaden improvements in training and development within the waste management sector, in order to achieve ‘in ever more complex operating conditions, the highest standards of legislative and regulatory compliance, safety, customer care and environmental protection and sustainability’ (ref. 18).

215. Training and development opportunities are available for people working in waste services in both the public and private sector. The Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB)\(^1\) has a complete programme for training and development of all people working in the waste management industry. WAMITAB has worked with a number of council including Bexley (BOX 71).

**BOX 71  London Borough of Bexley and WAMITAB**

Bexley is conscious of the need to provide high quality and best value services, and recognise that this can only be achieved through well-trained and qualified personnel. Bexley Trading Services (BTS) provide Bexley’s waste collection under contract. Working with WAMITAB (the awarding body for the Certificates of Competence) and TRACKSS (their Regional Assessment Centre for Waste Management NVQs), BTS piloted the waste collection NVQs with a three-man waste paper collection crew and a five-man domestic waste collection crew. The loaders pursued the level 1 NVQ and the two drivers and a charge-hand pursued the level 2.

The development and assessment work consisted of:

- A one-day briefing/training and development session for the crews and their managers with TRACKSS
- Three days in which TRACKSS worked with each crew
- Off-site work by TRACKSS compiling the candidates’ evidence.

The candidates are happy to have achieved a nationally accredited qualification and the Council is planning a larger-scale roll-out of the programme.

*Source: Audit Commission research*

**LOCAL AGENDA 21, RECYCLING PLANS AND COMMUNITY PLANS**

216. Although there are examples of early BV reviews of waste management containing comment on the fit with LA21, the starting point for BV reviews will increasingly be the community strategy. BV reviews should be based on outcomes for which community plans provide the focus. The outcomes of reviews should be in line with the expectations of the users, and this should be outlined in the community plan. Some authorities have published their community plans, but they are mainly still at the development stage and references to community plans in BV reviews are limited. Linking to LA 21, recycling plans and community plans provides evidence of a positive and ‘joined up’ approach to the review and demonstrates that improvement is seen in a wider context rather than from a narrow service delivery perspective (BOX 72).

\(^1\) More information on WAMITAB and case studies can be found at [http://www.wamitab.org.uk](http://www.wamitab.org.uk)
‘The recycling plan and the BVR recognise the need to increase materials recycling and the segregation of organic/biodegradable wastes for composting (in support of the landfill directive targets). The recycling plan sets out how these might be achieved and the associated costs, and in general there are good links between the recommendations of the plan and the BVR.’

Source: Best value inspection report

**BETTER IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

217. Improvement plans are a key aspect of the review process. Inspectors have reported that improvement plans are often good at the operational level but less good at addressing strategic issues, for example there are very few proposals on minimising waste. The BV review should include an improvement plan that sets out what needs to improve; and why, when and how that improvement can be delivered and clearly underpinned by an objective assessment of the resource implications. There should be challenging targets designed to demonstrate and ensure the continuous improvement necessary to put the service among the best 25 per cent of authorities within five years. Members need to be signed up to the proposals, as the timescale is likely to extend beyond elections. Cross-party consensus would be the ideal.

218. Warwickshire ensured that the whole department produced the details of the improvement plan to ensure ownership and to ensure that staff knew what was expected of them. Warwickshire also had short, and medium term recommendations.

219. The BV review team should ask the question ‘what are we trying to achieve?’ when writing the improvement plan, with clear links to the identified weaknesses in the service. Inspectors have also commented that improvement plans are often based on ‘research words, not “do” words’, with few clear decisions or positive actions proposed. There should be specific targets and actions within the improvement plan, for example using the familiar SMART acronym (for both client and contractor):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>A clear outcome that can be related to the authority’s business priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurable</td>
<td>A performance standard that allows staff to know when they have achieved it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>Both manager and member of staff sign up to the targets set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Whilst targets should be demanding, staff must feel they are achievable within the time limits and resources available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timebound</td>
<td>Targets should have clear completion dates or an agreed point at which they will be reviewed and reset</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

220. There should be specific targets and actions within the improvement plan, with those charged with meeting the targets seeing them as realistic. Responsibility for delivery should be allocated to named officers, and monitoring arrangements set in place to ensure achievement of targets or provide explanations if necessary. But it is also important that operational staff are made and kept aware of the practical details of the improvement plan and any changes that may be needed to improve service delivery.
221. As well as clarity about what must be done and by whom, the improvement plan should also be costed both in terms of resources to take the actions proposed and the direct costs of the detailed proposals themselves. An improvement plan, which does not reflect the necessary resources to achieve the targets, has little value (BOX 73).

**BOX 73  Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

‘Knowsley had a clear idea about what an improvement plan could do for them: “How is information from option appraisal going to be used to drive the service forward?” The actual challenge is to deliver an effective improvement plan.

The officers at Knowsley used the BV process as a management tool not just as a five-year task to be completed. At the authority the BV process alone has improved operation, with officers asking if particular functions should be within their department, facilitating communication between departments.’

*Source: Best value inspection report*

222. The Leeds improvement plan includes a ‘contract with the public’: it is a customer care pledge for the refuse collection service and sets out service standards the public can expect and asks the public to play their part in helping to reduce and recycle waste. By setting up a contract with the public they are asking them to play their part in taking responsibility for the amount of waste they generate and their contribution towards sustainable development.

223. Improvement plans have been a recurring subject for comment by inspectors and there are some clear messages for those who have still to review waste services (BOX 74).
'Although the council developed an action plan as part of its best value review and has included a number of targets for improvement within it, we judged that the services were unlikely to improve significantly on the basis of that plan. Some key issues raised within the review were not resolved and many of the actions in the plan will not in themselves deliver significant improvement on the current levels of performance. Key issues not addressed are the limited capacity of council staff to carry out the action plan, given the competing priorities for their time, and the failure to link the review action plan to the council’s main budget and service planning activity.'

* * *

'The Council should ensure that improvement plans for the refuse collection and street cleaning services are effectively co-ordinated, include clear and specific targets and a timetable for achievement to get the services into the top 25 per cent in the next five years. [Be] clear about who is responsible for the delivery of plans and effective implementation ... In order for the services to show that they have accepted the need to make a step-change, they need to have an ambitious, effective and timely plan to make the necessary changes. The plan will need to show capacity and resources, in terms of both quantity and quality, to effectively implement the plan and make the improvements.'

* * *

'The improvement plan does not stand in isolation but is a key element of the five-year development plan for the service. A clear link is evident to the overall aims of the service.'

'Members, officers and contractors are aware of the plan and their role in delivering the actions.... An updated plan was presented and approved at the Environment Scrutiny Committee outlining progress to date and future action. This process takes place on a quarterly basis. The improvement plan is discussed at fortnightly team meetings with staff and on a weekly basis with the contractors. Targets are reviewed and progress is monitored. This has led to broad ownership of the plan by officers and the contractor and the delivery of the improvements.'

* * *

Source: Best value inspection reports
# CHECKLIST – BEST VALUE REVIEWS IN WASTE

## SCOPING

Does the review have as wide a scope as practical, covering the whole of the waste stream?

Have we considered the sequence in which we will carry out waste management and other reviews (so that waste reviews are informed by wider policy on environment, and sustainability etc)?

Has a realistic timescale been set for completion of the review?

Do we know the problems to which we are seeking a solution?

Does the review steering group include members who do not have cabinet portfolios as well as ones who do have such responsibilities?

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Is the review outcome rather than process focused (i.e. concentrating on how to improve services rather than on process for its own sake)?

Are elected members fully involved with and committed to the review?

Does the review build a consensus about the way forward?

Are there appropriate working arrangements that allow members with work and other responsibilities to participate effectively in reviews?

Do these arrangements also take proper account of officers’ other commitments?

Does the review reflect other linked strategic plans such as the waste strategy, the community plan and LA 21?

Are the following involved in the review?

- contractor (both private and voluntary sector)?
- in-house provider?
- internal and external scrutiny?
- union representatives?
- finance?
- reception staff?
- users?

## APPLYING THE ‘4CS’

Is the review challenging current approaches, i.e. taking a ‘blank sheet of paper’ approach?

Is the review making appropriate comparisons with others?

Do these comparisons cover:

- demand?
- expenditure and unit costs?
- efficiency measures?
- policy and service standards?
- service quality?
Does the review provide evidence to explain any unachieved targets?

Does the review consider how the service is managed, organised and provided?

Is the authority working with others to ensure that it uses consistent definitions when comparing cost and data?

Are cost comparisons interpreted in the light of:
- comparisons of policy, service standards and service quality?
- local circumstances?

Has the authority consulted:
- residents?
- contractors?
- other stakeholders?
- neighbouring authorities?
- voluntary sector?

Has the authority addressed any language or other barriers to effective consultation?

Has the authority demonstrated within the review how results of consultation are incorporated into decisions on service delivery?

Can the authority demonstrate that its current arrangements for providing the service are competitive, within the constraints of its quality standards?

IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Have members agreed the proposals?

Is there a SMART implementation plan, i.e. one that is
- Specific (the expected outcomes are clear as are responsibilities for achieving them)?
- Measurable (managers and staff know when they have achieved the outcomes)?
- Agreed (managers and staff know what is to be done, by when and have signed up to the targets)?
- Realistic (those involved believe that the targets, though challenging, are achievable within the time limits and resources available)?
- Timebound (there are agreed completion dates or points at which progress will be reviewed)?

Has the plan been costed:
- resources required to manage implementation?
- direct costs of implementation?

Have the necessary resources been provided?

Have responsibilities for actions been allocated?

Have specific timescales been set with target dates?

Is achievement against targets being monitored as part of a robust performance management system?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Inspection</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Judgement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnet, London Borough</td>
<td>Refuse Collection, Recycling and Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedfordshire County Council</td>
<td>Waste Management and Recycling</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham City Council</td>
<td>Waste Recycling</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent, London Borough</td>
<td>Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnley Borough Council</td>
<td>Refuse Collection and Street Cleaning Service</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council</td>
<td>Waste Management</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Hertfordshire District Council</td>
<td>Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erewash Borough Council</td>
<td>Street Cleaning</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow, London Borough</td>
<td>Refuse Collection Service</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillingdon, London Borough</td>
<td>Waste services: Refuse Collection, Civic Amenity and Recycling Review</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council</td>
<td>Cleanliness of the Environment</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewes District Council</td>
<td>Environmental Stewardship</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macclesfield Borough Council</td>
<td>Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Sussex District Council</td>
<td>Refuse Collection, Street Sweeping, and Public Conveniences Cleansing</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oadby and Wigston Borough Council</td>
<td>Waste Management</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council</td>
<td>Refuse Collection and Street Cleaning Services</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oswestry Borough Council</td>
<td>Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond upon Thames, London Borough</td>
<td>Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutland County Council</td>
<td>Combined Services of Refuse Collection, Street Cleansing and Grounds</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedgemoor District Council</td>
<td>Clean Surroundings</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council</td>
<td>Cleansing Service</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Gloucestershire Council</td>
<td>Integrated Waste Management Service</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Probably</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Inspection</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Judgement</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Holland District Council</td>
<td>Refuse, Recycling and Cleaning</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Kesteven District Council</td>
<td>Waste management</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland City Council</td>
<td>Streetcare Services</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telford and Wrekin Council</td>
<td>Waste Management Service</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen County Borough Council</td>
<td>Review of Environmental Services</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunbridge Wells Borough Council</td>
<td>Waste Management and Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waltham Forest, London Borough</td>
<td>Trade Waste Service</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrington Borough Council</td>
<td>Waste Management</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwickshire County Council</td>
<td>Waste Management</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watford Borough Council</td>
<td>Keeping the Town Clean</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Devon Borough Council</td>
<td>Waste Management</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Dorset District Council</td>
<td>Street Cleaning and Refuse Collection</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Lancashire District Council</td>
<td>Street Cleansing</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woking Borough Council</td>
<td>Waste Management</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester City Council</td>
<td>Refuse Collection, Street Cleaning, Recycling and Public Toilets</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthing Borough Council</td>
<td>Refuse Collection, Recycling and Cleansing Service</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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