PERFORMANCE REVIEW IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

a handbook for auditors and local authorities

Environmental Services
Performance Review in Local Government

Environmental Services
Acknowledgements

ISBN for complete pack of 8 booklets and binder
0 11 701302 1
ISBN for this booklet only
0 11 701305 6

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First published 1986

Edited, designed and produced for the Audit
Commission by:
Learning Materials Design,
Lovat Bank, Silver Street,
Newport Pagnell, Bucks, MK16 0EJ

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Published by:
Her Majesty's Stationery Office
for:
The Audit Commission for Local
Authorities in England and Wales,
1 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PN

Printed in the UK for HMSO

The authors are very grateful to the following who have read and commented on the materials in this handbook:

John Allred, Leeds University
Association of Chief Police Officers of England,
Wales and Northern Ireland
Association of Colleges for Further and Higher
Education
Association of County Councils
Association of Directors of Social Services
Association of District Councils
Association of London Borough Engineers and
Surveyors
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Municipal Engineers
Association of Polytechnic Teachers
Association of Principals of Colleges
D J Bartlett, Financial Controller, London Borough
of Bexley
Philip Bean, Nottingham University
G B Blacker, Chief Executive and Treasurer, Royal
Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
James O L Brass, Director of Planning, Derby City
Council
Centre for Policy on Ageing
Chartered Institute of Public Finance and
Accountancy
Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association
Committee of Directors of Polytechnics
Council of Local Education Authorities
County Surveyors' Society
Department of Education and Science
Department of the Environment
Department of Health and Social Security
Department of Transport
Professor Rigas Doganis, Polytechnic of Central
London
Michael Eastwood, Director of Environmental
Health, City of Manchester

Derek Fowlie, Bursar, Brighton Polytechnic
Further Education Staff College
Jack Hanson, Past President of ADSS
John Holbrow, Management Services Officer,
Metropolitan Police
Home Office
S T Howarth, Force Financial Officer, West Mercia
Constabulary
David Humphreys, Principal, Stockport College
Institute of Burial and Cremation
Administration, Inc
Institute of Housing
Institute of Trading Standards Administration
Institute of Wastes Management
Institution of Environmental Health Officers
R J Kedney, Senior Assistant Director of
Education, Liverpool City Council
Library Association
David Morton, Senior Accountant, British Airports
Authority
National Association of Teachers in Further and
Higher Education
National Consumer Council
Office of Arts and Libraries
A R Quinton, Chief Leisure and Tourism Officer,
Arun District Council
Dr J W Raine, INLOGOV
Royal Town Planning Institute
Society of Education Officers
Sports Council
Brian Summers, Finance Officer, The New
Birmingham International Airport
Waste Disposal Engineers' Association
David Whynes, Nottingham University
Professor Arthur Wilcocks, Nottingham University
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Preface

This booklet is part of 'Performance review in local government: a handbook for auditors and local authorities'.

The handbook has been prepared by the Audit Commission as a working document to help auditors and local authorities appraise the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of services. It should help to focus attention on aspects of services that appear wasteful or capable of improvement, and to identify aspects of services that merit further investigation. It should also help to promote debate on how quality in services is to be assessed, alongside the quantifiable measures of efficient performance.

Summary of contents

The handbook consists of ten sections:

1. Introduction
2. Education
3. Environmental Services
4. Housing
5. Law and Order
6. Leisure and Libraries
7. Planning and Transportation
8. Social Services
9. Central Services (to be published in 1987)
10. Statistical Supplement (to be published annually from 1987)

This preface is reprinted for reference at the start of each booklet.

The introductory booklet gives the background context to the need for performance review, considers arrangements for it within an authority, and explores some of the difficulties which authorities may face in measuring performance and implementing change.

The service-specific booklets, like this one, provide for each service:

1. A brief description of the main elements of the service, and a discussion of the key issues in examining the performance of the service in terms of value for money. This section includes a bibliography of useful government and other publications.

2. A more detailed series of review questions which will help to guide the assessment and improvement of current arrangements for managing the service. Useful references and performance indicators are shown alongside the relevant questions. These include indicators of effectiveness (for example inspectors' reports, trends in usage, public attitudes) as well as quantifiable measures of efficiency (for example pupil/teacher ratios, m² per client).

Some of the questions in the performance review guides relate to policy matters to be decided by members, or are the professional responsibility of officers as their advisers. These questions are shown in italic. The auditor's interest is in ensuring that these issues have been addressed and that appropriate policies and management arrangements have been determined. Auditors should also be sensitive to such wider considerations when making judgements on resources usage.
The indicators listed in this booklet are not accompanied by a value. They simply designate what is to be examined, for example clients per employee, costs per m². However, there are some norms, standards or benchmarks which are widely accepted, or which have been positively identified during detailed reviews by the Audit Commission or some other recognised body. Where these exist, the appropriate value or range of values, for example X clients per employee, £Y per m², will be listed in the statistical supplement, which will be published annually.

Careful comparisons with other local authorities can provide a useful starting point for reviewing current practices. However, differences in the value of indicators between one authority and another, or between an authority and the given norm, should never form the sole basis for conclusions. Rather they should lead to more searching enquiries into the circumstances which give rise to such differences, and the opportunities which exist for improvements to be made.

The approach of the handbook
This handbook does not suggest that there should be uniform approaches to service provision, or standard levels of output. It recognises that the very essence of local government is variety, but emphasises that variety should stem from the efficient and effective meeting of local needs, rather than from poor management or inadequate policy making.

Three themes therefore run through the handbook:

1 The need to emphasise the outputs of services, and relate these to inputs. Success in the public sector lies in the quality of the services provided. In general, the balance needs to be tipped from the current emphasis on inputs by providers, to an emphasis on the outputs received by the public. In some services, measures of output are clear. In others, where detailed research has not been carried out, the approach needs to be more cautious, particularly for services where the outputs may well be contentious, for example social work or the police service.

2 The need to make best use of available resources. Performance appraisal is often portrayed as mere cost cutting. But in essence it is about querying whether money is being spent on those things that will improve the quality of services now and in the future. For example, money tied up in low-occupancy schools is money that cannot be used to pay for more teachers, or be diverted to provide care for the growing number of elderly people in our society.

3 The need for performance review to be an integral part of the management process. At officer level, departmental managers should be keeping services under continual review. Many problems can be dealt with by the officers working within agreed policies. The members' responsibility is to satisfy themselves that the service is being managed properly and to examine in more depth those issues which have policy implications.
Using the handbook
The handbook has been prepared with auditors, officers and members in mind.

Auditors may find the handbook a useful adjunct to The Local Government Auditor (The Black Book), giving a service by service guide to value for money issues. The handbook documents and builds on a lot of the good work that has already been done around the country.

Officers may find it a useful statement on service delivery and performance. It has been developed in discussion with many professionals in the field. Chief officers may find it useful for questioning middle managers, and middle managers may find it helpful for raising issues of quality and effectiveness, when auditors are questioning efficiency and economy.

Members may find it a useful guide to the audit approach, and a helpful basis for reviewing, and where necessary challenging the approach of officers with regard to the performance of particular services.

The scope of the handbook
The handbook documents, for each service, the key elements which contribute to its success or failure, the key criteria on which to justify its continued existence.

It does not attempt to give an exhaustive description of every facet of every service, nor every issue of policy, quality, professional judgement or effectiveness. It simply represents the state of the art, drawing together the available information and work done so far. Constructive criticisms and contributions would be welcomed, particularly on issues which are omitted, or only briefly covered, in this edition.

An update service is planned, beginning in 1987 with a new section on central services, minor amendments to the service-specific sections and a statistical supplement. Thereafter the handbook will be revised in whole, or in part, according to changes in policy and practices around the country.

Comments should be sent to
The Director of Management Practice,
The Audit Commission,
1 Vincent Square,
London SW1P 2PN.
Cemeteries and Crematoria

Introduction to the service

Cemeteries and crematoria are a relatively small if inescapable service. It is, however, a service where quality, appearances and a regard for the feelings of the bereaved would rank very high in terms of service delivery and satisfaction received. These issues, and the hostile reaction to disruptive industrial action during the 'winter of discontent', show how strongly the public feel about the standard of service provided.

Trends

With dwindling space and increasing cost of burials, the cemetery has taken second place to the crematorium. In many places the former may have effectively become parks in which burials occasionally take place.

Moreover local authority cremations now provide a small surplus compared to a deficit of 73% for burials.

RELATIVE COSTS OF BURIAL AND CREMATION 1984/5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross expenditure</th>
<th>Burial £443</th>
<th>Cremation £66</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income £120</td>
<td>£120</td>
<td>£120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit</td>
<td>£244</td>
<td>£56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>£282</td>
<td>£282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premises</td>
<td>£70</td>
<td>£70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>£111</td>
<td>£111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

£26 £18 £22

Source: CIPFA Cemeteries and Crematoria Statistics 1984/5 Actuals

Expenditure

Expenditure on cemeteries and crematoria is estimated for 1986/7 at £40 million net.
Current management issues

The main issues for management are:

1. Standards of service.
2. Charging policies.
3. Management of resources.

Despite the falling demand for burials, there has often been a hostile reaction to the progressive change to lawn style cemetery arrangements (as opposed to kerbs, crosses, headstones etc) which are intended as an improvement in standards as well as in maintenance efficiency. Some authorities have attempted to communicate the reasons for new developments to the public through newsletters, posters or the local press.

The service also has to cater for the ceremonies of ethnic groups which may be very different from majority custom and practice.

Effectiveness is hard to evaluate beyond the level of public satisfaction. Since there is usually no effective competition, the absence of expressed dissatisfaction may be the main performance indicator, alongside visible evidence of good maintenance.

The charges made for various facilities are generally within the discretion of the local authority and vary very widely. They provide for a range of services to meet individual wishes.

Some authorities impose higher charges for non-residents. Generally, however, the charges need to be related to the cost of the service provided.

Flexibility in the use of labour is important in a service where there is both seasonal variation in the volume of work and in the incidence of maintenance, for example grass cutting.

Interchangeability of staff between cemeteries and crematoria and with parks and other departments is usually necessary for full use of resources.

Bibliography

Though not a statutory requirement, adherence to the Code is regarded as good practice.


Both of these reports are of general application. Energy costs are particularly important in crematoria.
Performance review guide
This section sets out a detailed series of questions which will help to guide the review and improvement of current management arrangements.

Some of the questions relate to policy matters to be decided by members, or are the professional responsibility of officers as their advisers. These questions are shown in italic. The auditor's interest is in ensuring that these issues have been addressed and that appropriate policies and management arrangements have been determined. Auditors should also be sensitive to such wider considerations when making judgements on resource usage.

Useful performance indicators and reference documents are shown alongside the relevant questions. Careful comparisons with other local authorities can provide a useful starting point for reviewing current practices. However, differences in the value of indicators between one authority and another, or between an authority and accepted norms, should never form the sole basis for conclusions. Rather they should lead to more searching enquiries into the circumstances which give rise to such differences, and the opportunities which exist for improvements to be made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review questions</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Standards of service</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any evidence of public satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service?</td>
<td>Complaints/commendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In areas where there is competition, this may be reflected in an increase or a fall in demand in relation to deaths.</td>
<td>Letters in the press etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will existing facilities be adequate in the future? If not has the council made plans to deal with the situation?</td>
<td>Number of unused plots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is support for innovation (eg landscaping of cemeteries) secured from the public?</td>
<td>Methods used to communicate with public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the 'Code of Cremation Practice' complied with?</td>
<td>Reports to Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are operations kept under review by members?</td>
<td>Gross cost per burial (£)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reports should enable them to see that there are no undue delays in dealing with funerals and that expenditure and income are at acceptable levels.</td>
<td>Gross cost per hectare (£)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gross cost per cremation (£)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% maintained graves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review questions | Key Indicators/References
---|---

2 Charging policies

Is there an annual review of fees and charges?

- Particularly where there is competition from privately owned facilities, the level of establishment charges needs to be equitable.
- Charges should be related to the cost of particular services, e.g., graves maintenance.
- Some authorities charge higher rates for burying/cremating non-residents.

How do charges compare with other authorities and with private concerns?

Income % gross expenditure

Income per burial (£)
Income per cremation (£)
Income per maintained grave space (£)
Charges for specific services (£)

3 Management of resources

Are employees flexibly used?

- Wherever possible there should be interchange between cemeteries and crematoria and with parks and other departments.
- Gravediggers are normally employed on gardening or other tasks during summer months when death rates are lower.

Do bonus schemes provide clear benefits both to the Authority and to employees?

Bonuses % gross pay
Values compared with other authorities

What proportion of employees have relevant qualifications, e.g., Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration's Diploma and/or Certificate of Proficiency in Cremation Operation?

Utilisation (%)
Equipment costs % total expenditure

Is optimum use made of new technology, e.g., mechanical diggers?

Cost of supplies per burial (£)
Commodity prices
[See: Reducing the Cost of Local Government Purchases]

How does expenditure on supplies compare with other authorities/installations?

Energy costs per cremation (£)
Normalised performance indicator
[See: Saving Energy in Local Government Buildings]

How do crematorium energy costs compare with those of other establishments?
Environmental Health

Introduction to the service

It is often said that the great increases in longevity during the last century and a half are much more attributable to public health measures than to advances in medical science. The environmental health service is historically at the very heart of local administration, yet the public remains largely unaware of its achievements and sometimes much more aware of its failings.

Though many factors enter into the totality of increased life expectancy, dramatic gains follow basic improvements in environmental health measures. Table 1 shows the overall changes this century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life expectancy at birth in the United Kingdom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though most of the duties of the environmental health service are statutory, there are wide differences in the approach to them and the way they are managed. There are also differences in the extent to which non-statutory and agency functions are undertaken. The 'mix' of problems varies greatly from one area to another and the following list of responsibilities is not definitive:

- a) food hygiene
- b) meat inspection
- c) health and safety
- d) pollution control
- e) housing
- f) infectious diseases
- g) animal welfare
- h) port health
- i) health education
- j) pest control
- k) nuisances
- l) public conveniences
- m) drainage
- n) caravan and gypsy sites
- o) licensing.

The recent changes in local government have meant that, in metropolitan areas, environmental health departments have also become responsible for trading standards. Street cleansing, waste collection and waste disposal are also often considered to be part of the service. All these functions are dealt with in later chapters of this booklet.

The allocation of certain functions, for example certain housing duties, to Environmental Health Departments varies between authorities.

Other agencies are also involved in some activities, and close contact is needed for example with the Health and Safety Executive, Water Authorities, NHS, RSPCA and Government Departments. Within local government there will be involvement in planning and development control, education, fire, housing and other services.

Expenditure

Expenditure on environmental health services (excluding port health) in 1986/7 is estimated at £384 million net (£8 per head).
Trends

In recent years there have been many changes in the problems facing environmental health officers (EHOS) in this country. They include changes in health and safety legislation which impose additional responsibilities. These are to increase under forthcoming regulations which allocate such duties between local authorities and factory inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive.

A number of infectious diseases have been eradicated and the industrial smog which killed or incapacitated many urban citizens has been greatly reduced. On the other hand, councils particularly in industrial areas, will be anxious to avoid the experiences of a Seveso or Bhopal.

The graph illustrates trends in infectious diseases, one of the problems EHOS have to contend with. It also highlights difficulties in using statistics, such as differences in the extent to which incidents are reported and their classification. In this instance, dysentery falls whilst food poisoning increases: the two together show significant but less extreme trends.

EHOS are closely involved in urban renewal as they are trained to assess housing standards. They are also becoming much more involved in some areas in the wider problems of housing and homelessness. (See the section on Housing in this handbook.)

Changes in the work of environmental officers have been reflected in an increased level of real expenditure since the late seventies, from £325 million net in 1978/9 to £370 million net in 1984/5.
Current management issues

The major issues for management are:

1. Identifying environmental health issues, and health and safety hazards, and determining priorities for action.
2. Investigating complaints and pursuing other duties arising from Council policies.
3. Liaising with other service departments and other health and safety agencies.
4. Managing and deploying staff and other resources.

A major difference between councils is the extent to which policies for the service are pro-active, or preventive, rather than responsive.

A pro-active approach will involve monitoring developments, particularly in industrial practices, to identify health and safety hazards before they become a reality, for example ensuring that the processing of new substances is undertaken in safe conditions and that the community at large is not put at risk by exhaustion of gases to the atmosphere or unsuitable methods of waste disposal. It will also involve a health education programme and possibly advice to developers and others.

Housing standards in both the private and public sectors vary greatly. In some areas, EHOs will be greatly concerned with the problems of unfit dwellings, deteriorating private houses and the improvement of run-down council estates. In others, the problems of homelessness will direct attention to houses in multiple occupation and the standards of hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation.

Dealing with complaints, and other duties arising from Council policies, may restrict the extent to which the Department can take a pro-active approach.

The effectiveness of the Environmental Health Department may be indicated by its achievement of the Council’s policy priorities – for example, Clean Air Zones created, reductions in numbers of unfit dwellings or notified occupational accidents.

In a wider sense, vital statistics will give an indication of health problems faced and success in dealing with them. For example, though factors other than cleaner air may affect the incidence of respiratory disease, it is reasonable to draw comfort from a fall which accompanies parallel reductions in the levels of smoke and sulphur emissions as shown in the example below, from Manchester City Council. However, inferences of this kind need to be drawn with care, and – like many other aspects of this service – can only be reviewed over a number of years.
More immediate indicators may be found in the achievement of the EHO's visiting programme and the unit cost of doing so. The work of Meat Inspectors and Pest Control Officers may be similarly monitored. Such monitoring needs to be accompanied by appropriately rigorous quality control, if standards are not to be threatened.

The processing and payment of renovation grants may be monitored by the timeliness of payments, the proportions granted and the cost or manpower per grant made.

Complaints, usage and hours out of order are useful indicators with regard to public conveniences. More specific cleansing and the use of vandal-proof materials may improve standards.

In making inter-authority comparisons, especial care is needed to compare like with like. For instance, in comparing crude death rates the age profile of the authority must be taken into account (for example, Worthing's crude death rate is 22.5 compared with an average of 11.6, but its population is older). Many statistics need to be 'normalised' before they can be used as the basis for further enquiry.

Bibliography
The Environmental Health Officer in an Industrial Society (1980) World Health Organisation
Describes modern needs and the development of suitable training.


Environmental Health: Research Paper 4 (1986) RIPA

Report of a study by Professor Gerald Rhodes which includes histories of the development of the environmental health and trading standards services.

Central/Local Relations: the Experience of the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Services (1986) RIPA

Reports of the Institute of Environmental Health Officers
Contain useful statistics and other information.
Performance Review in Local Government — Environmental Services

**Performance review guide**

This section sets out a detailed series of questions which will help to guide the review and improvement of current management arrangements.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review questions</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Identifying areas for action</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the recognised health problems in the area, eg lead, asbestos, radiation, food handling?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a Council policy based on substantive evidence for environmental health, setting out priorities and targets?</td>
<td>Statement of policy issued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do these priorities take account of current and expected demographic, industrial and other changes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the Council monitor achievement of its policies?</td>
<td>Long term statistical trends, eg:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– pollution levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– numbers of unfit houses demolished and remaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– morbidity rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– dwellings improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent are the policies of the Council pro-active, or preventive, rather than responsive?</td>
<td>Courses run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiences reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in contraventions observed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pro-active policies will involve monitoring industry for health and safety hazards. They will also involve a health education programme, eg hygiene training for food handlers, exhibitions for the public, publicity campaigns, visits to schools. They may also include advice to developers, industrial firms and others before the planning application stage.
**Review questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any special concerns in the area? For example:</td>
<td>% authorities with these special concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) airports, harbours, other transit points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) heavy industry, chemical process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) hazardous waste</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) slaughterhouses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) offensive trades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) mining or mineral extraction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) other hazards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do health statistics and other local trends suggest:</td>
<td>Incidences of disease and accidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) problems not yet addressed?</td>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) policy objectives which have been or are about to be achieved?</td>
<td>Noise and other pollution levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) those which are not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2 Information and complaints**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there effective procedures for acting on information and complaints from other organisations and the public?</td>
<td>Elapsed time from receipt to first action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are target times for dealing with them set?</td>
<td>Number of complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there much activity by local environmental pressure groups?</td>
<td>Public attitude surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the Environmental Health Department's consideration of planning applications expeditious and thorough?</td>
<td>Process times Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are applications for grants and licences quickly determined?</td>
<td>Process times Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other responsibilities are laid upon the Environmental Health Department, eg urban renewal, housing action areas, slum clearance, trading standards?</td>
<td>Process times Proportions granted Cost/manpower per grant made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[See sections of this handbook on Housing, Trading Standards, etc]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3 Liaison with other bodies**

*Are there adequate arrangements for liaison with other departments within the Authority, other local authorities, District Health Authorities and other bodies concerned with environmental health?*

- **Joint LA/DHA Committees and financing arrangements are quite common.**

Do agency arrangements with Water Authorities and other bodies have responsibilities and financial provisions clearly defined?
### Review questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Management of resources</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does expenditure compare with that of other similar local authorities?</td>
<td>Net expenditure per 1000 population (£)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a visiting/inspection programme for each major activity area? Is it monitored and are numbers of visits/inspections per employee up to expectations?</td>
<td>Population per EHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement of visiting programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visits per EHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pest control visits per Pest Control Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Weighted' inspections per meat inspection employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do employees complete time sheets and are these related to visiting programmes etc?</td>
<td>Income received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can statutory obligations and other Council policies be accomplished with existing appropriately qualified staff?</td>
<td>Date of review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is optimum use made of computers and technical equipment?</td>
<td>Fees and recharge % gross expenditure on tasks concerned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is income recouped from advertisements in leaflets, public conveniences etc?</td>
<td>Cost per convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When were charges for services last reviewed?</td>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is expenditure attributable to other agencies and persons fully recovered?</td>
<td>Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Time recording and management accounting needs to be adequate for this purpose.</td>
<td>Hours out of order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the system for maintaining public conveniences, eg permanent attendant, cleansing teams, patrolling attendants?</td>
<td>Reports on and expenditure arising from vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What steps have been taken to combat vandalism?</td>
<td>Date of review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where bonus schemes are in operation, when were they last reviewed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction to the service
Street cleansing is one of local government's oldest responsibilities. It is also a service through which a public impression of the local authority and its environment is most readily gained.

Locally, the cost varies according to the nature of the area and the importance attributed to the function by the Council.

Generally street sweeping may be considered under two headings – sweeping for maintenance and safety purposes and amenity sweeping. The first is the responsibility of the Highway Authority and may be performed by its own direct labour or contractors or through an agent district council.

Amenity sweeping – anything over and above the minimum deemed necessary for safety by the Highway Authority – is the responsibility of district councils. It too may be undertaken by direct labour or contracted out. Privatisation, however, is not common. Where it is in operation it is usually as part of a wider cleansing package.

Trends
Financial and other national statistics for this service are hard to find. It is widely accepted and, in some areas, visually evident that standards have fallen in recent years. This is firstly because recruitment of suitably motivated sweepers became difficult, encouraging the greater use of mechanical methods. Lately, the economic situation has resulted in cuts in real expenditure levels as Highway Authorities have sought ways to sustain the standards of other areas of maintenance.

Current management issues

The two main management concerns are:

1 Standards of service.
2 The management of resources.

The Highway Authority's interest may be to keep street sweeping to the minimum needed for maintenance and safety purposes. However, too infrequent a service may result in added expenditure on other aspects of highway maintenance (for example gully cleansing) and/or hazardous driving conditions (for example reduced visibility from dirty spray, or accidents through skidding or impact with debris on the road).

District councils are usually more concerned with environmental matters such as the containment of litter and the minimising of complaints from residents.

Standards of service – for example the frequency and intensity of sweeping beyond the requirements of maintenance and safety, the numbers and location of litter bins and arrangements for emptying them, and the vigour with which the Litter Acts are enforced – are matters for the Council's discretion. Variations in policy between authorities will have an influence on expenditure levels.

Expenditure
The total expenditure on street cleansing is estimated at £92 million in 1985/6 net (£2 per head).
Effectiveness can be determined visually. Large accumulations of litter will bring complaints from citizens. One way of indicating performance is by comparing litter accumulation with a set of graded photographs, such as that produced by the Keep Britain Tidy Group.

The Council's view of the performance required will be influenced by the nature of the area, its residents and visitors. For example, a tourist or commercial centre may call for higher standards. Shopping precincts will generally get more attention than suburban roads. Residents in affluent areas are likely to be more vocal about standards than those in decaying inner cities. These and many other matters need to be taken into account in making comparisons.

The management of resources will vary according to local circumstances but flexibility is generally important, for example the use of sweeping personnel for winter maintenance work, interchangeability with gully emptying, grass cutting, work in parks.

On sweeping itself, unit costs or time per length or area swept are the main efficiency indicators. Inter-authority comparisons are difficult because of the lack of consistent data; but, at a detailed level, comparison of standard values and rates of pay embodied in incentive schemes are usually possible.

Agency arrangements vary greatly and are sometimes the subject of dispute between the county and the agent district. Agencies may arise from voluntary agreement or from a district council claiming its right under S42 of the Highways Act 1980 to maintain urban roads (other than trunk or classified roads), footpaths and bridleways. The financial agreement may provide for a set percentage split of expenditure, flat rate payment for a specified programme, or a schedule of rates.

Arrangements under the Goods and Services Act may also be employed.

Bibliography
Includes recommendations and standards for street cleansing.

Highway Maintenance: A Code of Good Practice (1983) Associations of County Councils, District Councils and Metropolitan Authorities
Covers standards, management practice and performance measurement.

Code of Practice for Routine Maintenance (1985) Department of Transport
Sets out standards for routine maintenance of motorways and trunk roads.

Includes a client's view of performance in the service.

Phase I covers street sweeping. Phase II will cover agency agreements in detail.
Performance review guide

This section sets out a detailed series of questions which will help to guide the review and improvement of current management arrangements.

Some of the questions relate to policy matters to be decided by members, or are the professional responsibility of officers as their advisers. These questions are shown in italic. The auditor's interest is in ensuring that these issues have been addressed and that appropriate policies and management arrangements have been determined. Auditors should also be sensitive to such wider considerations when making judgements on resource usage.

Useful performance indicators and reference documents are shown alongside the relevant questions. Careful comparisons with other local authorities can provide a useful starting point for reviewing current practices. However, differences in the value of indicators between one authority and another, or between an authority and accepted norms, should never form the sole basis for conclusions. Rather they should lead to more searching enquiries into the circumstances which give rise to such differences, and the opportunities which exist for improvements to be made.

### Review questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Standards of service</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the Council have clearly stated policies for street sweeping?</td>
<td>Schedule of sweeping frequencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- These should include sweeping frequencies for each area of the authority, the methods to be employed and the standards expected.</td>
<td>Agency agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Council policies for the provision, location and emptying of litter bins, including the enforcement of Litter Acts, both made known and observed?</td>
<td>Contract specification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What methods are used to assess the quality of street cleansing?</td>
<td>Visual evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the views of the public sought?</td>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the findings of quality supervision reported to the Council?</td>
<td>Successful prosecutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are new businesses required or asked to contribute towards the cost of street cleansing?</td>
<td>Visual evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Take-away food firms may be given planning permission on undertaking to pay for the added cost of dealing with their litter.</td>
<td>Keep Britain Tidy Group (KBTG) photographic index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blockages, flooding etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results of consultations with Tenants' and Residents' Associations etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public attitude surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Council/Committee reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Review in Local Government — Environmental Services

Review questions

If fly-tipping is a problem, is this brought about by the policies of the Council or neighbouring Councils, eg arrangements and charges for trade refuse, the provision of litter bins?

2 Management of resources

What are the arrangements for carrying out the service, eg agency, S42, Goods and Services?

Are these arrangements the subject of fully scheduled agreements on areas to be covered, frequencies, standards and financing?

Does the Council get a fair deal from agency agreements, contract arrangements etc?

Are client interests clearly distinguished from those of service providers, eg contractors, agent authorities, DLOs?

Does the client have an accurate inventory? Can it be accessed by the agent?

What form of supervision is exercised by the client over agent, agent over contractor or goods and services arrangements etc?

Is the Council getting value for money from the agreed work schedules for street cleansing?

- Comparisons with other authorities should be included in cost information provided in reports to Committee.
- It is important to establish what is included in the sweeping task, eg litter picking, bin emptying.
- Bonus schemes should give benefits both to employees and to the Authority.

Is reserve manpower shared with gully cleansing, refuse collection, parks etc?

What happens in bad weather conditions, eg are arrangements made to transfer staff to winter maintenance?

How many mechanical sweepers does the Authority have, of what type, eg single or dual purpose, dedicated, sweeper/gully emptiers?

How many spare vehicles are there?

Key Indicators/References

Forms of agreement

Proportion cost borne by Highway Authority (%)

Proportion cost borne by agent authority (%)

[See: Audit Commission Report and Audit Guide on Highway Maintenance, section on street sweeping]

Standard minute values

Cost per road length swept (£)

Cost per 1000m² swept (£)

Cost per 1000m²/linear km swept (£)

Cost per employee hour (£)

Reports to Committee

Comparison with LAMSAC STREETS package

Cost per 1000 population (£)

[See: Audit Commission Report and Audit Guide on Highway Maintenance]

% related to size of fleet
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review questions</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How fully are they utilised?</td>
<td>Idle time (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Km swept channel per vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other methods are employed, eg team sweeping, orderly with hand barrow,</td>
<td>[See: Audit Commission Report and Audit Guide on Highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mechanical barrow?</td>
<td>Maintenance]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the arrangements for waste disposal?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[21]
Waste Collection

Introduction to the service
Waste collection is a sensitive service — everyone is affected by it and its operatives are the council employees with whom ratepayers are most likely to have direct contact. It is a service on which there is generally a high level of public satisfaction as measured by opinion surveys.

The service has been among the first to feel the impact of privatisation. In some instances this has brought about the demise of the direct labour service. In others, the threat of privatisation has produced the changes in attitude needed for efficient management. However, relatively few authorities have opted for privatisation so far, and there has been a mixed response among those that have.

Trends
Expenditure in real terms has fallen in recent years. Much of the fall has come from increased productivity, though often changes in method to achieve this have also meant changes in the quality of service, for example from back-door to kerbside collection.

Expenditure
Estimated expenditure for 1985/6 on waste collection was £400 million net (£8 per head of population).

Current management issues

Major issues for management are:
1 Standards of service.
2 Charges to be made for trade waste and other services.
3 Efficient management and maintenance of the service.
Standards and charges

The standard of service has three main aspects – frequency, convenience to the public, and care in handling the waste. Most councils provide for a weekly collection but some have twice weekly collections for at least parts of their areas, usually on amenity grounds or in areas where there are many hotels or lodgings to be collected from. Inevitably the cost is greater. However, standards of service are a matter for local decision.

Cost savings are often achievable by changes in method, but some changes reduce the standard of service by requiring householders to take their bin or sack to the pavement.

Charging for trade refuse and other services is not a simple matter. Tariffs set too low may lose income unnecessarily, but very high charges may encourage traders and others to make their own arrangements. Sometimes this can be undesirable – for example, fly-tipping locally or in adjoining districts causes both nuisance to residents and added cost to the councils concerned.

Management of the service

There are arguments for and against privatisation and there is no immutable reason why it should be better than direct labour. However, the existence of a possible alternative is a spur to providers, whoever they may be.

There are many variations of method available to management, each with its own benefits and disadvantages. Various combinations of vehicle type and crew size are suitable for different local conditions. Sacks are easier to handle than bins but can be more costly. On average, manpower accounts for just over half the total expenditure, and transport for a further quarter.

Unit costs (per tonne, per head, per container, per cubic metre, per premise) or those same units per loader are useful efficiency indicators. However, these indicators need to be considered in relation to local geographic and industrial conditions and standards of service.

For a more detailed evaluation LAMSAC's Refuse Operations System Simulation (ROSS) provides an assessment of the efficiency of collection in relation to a number of variables, for example method and frequency of collection, depot and disposal locations, vehicles and men.

The validity of any of these approaches is heavily dependent on the availability and accuracy of the authority's basic information about number of bins, distances travelled, length of walks etc.
Performance Review in Local Government — Environmental Services

Bibliography

Advice on Storage and on Treatment of Household, Commercial and Industrial Wastes (1984)
Contract Refuse Collections: Guidelines for Local Authorities (1985)
The above three publications give guidance from the Institute of Waste Management.

Includes a client's view of performance of the service.

Securing Further Improvements in Refuse Collection, Audit Commission (1984) HMSO
Sets out in detail the main issues and how to review the service.

Both these reports have particular relevance to refuse collection.
Performance Review Guide

This section sets out a detailed series of questions which will help to guide the review and improvement of current management arrangements.

Some of the questions relate to policy matters to be decided by members, or are the professional responsibility of officers as their advisers. These questions are shown in italic. The auditor’s interest is in ensuring that these issues have been addressed and that appropriate policies and management arrangements have been determined. Auditors should also be sensitive to such wider considerations when making judgements on resource usage.

Useful performance indicators and reference documents are shown alongside the relevant questions. Careful comparisons with other local authorities can provide a useful starting point for reviewing current practices. However, differences in the value of indicators between one authority and another, or between an authority and accepted norms, should never form the sole basis for conclusions. Rather they should lead to more searching enquiries into the circumstances which give rise to such differences, and the opportunities which exist for improvements to be made.

Review questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Standards of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the Council keep its waste collection service under review to ensure that:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) rounds and collection frequencies are matched to changes in local housing, environmental and economic conditions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) the options on collection methods are properly considered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When was the last review?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is any higher than average cost considered justified by the higher standard of service provided?

Has there been any assessment of public satisfaction with service standards in terms of frequency, convenience, and care in handling the waste?

• This is especially useful before and after changes in method.

If collection methods are changed (eg from back door to kerbside) what arrangements have been made for disabled and elderly people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of missed collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting time for special collections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Review in Local Government — Environmental Services

Review questions | Key Indicators/References
---|---

2 Charging policies
What is Council policy on charging for trade refuse and other special services?

How do charges compare with costs and with other local authorities?

When were charges last reviewed?

Have any adverse effects been observed following increases in charges, eg switch to private collection, or increases in fly-tipping locally or in neighbouring districts?

Does the Council seek additional sources of income, eg advertising on vehicles, scrap sales?

Income per non-domestic hereditament
Income % gross expenditure
Date of review
Income from such sources

3 Management of resources
Have alternative service delivery and collection methods been reviewed in recent years by:

a) management services?

b) consultants?

Where alternatives have been chosen, have the promised improvements been forthcoming?

Were all available collection methods considered during the review? These include:

a) kerbside collection
b) back-door collection
c) back-door collection, kerbside return
d) bins or sacks
e) using skips, bin carriers, wheeled bins
f) pull-out in advance.

- The cost effects of change can be considerable, eg a switch from back-door to kerbside collection in a densely populated area could reduce direct costs by 50%. Sacks are better for long walks on premises, bins are better for kerbside.
- Changes may affect the perceived standard of service.

Where direct labour is employed is the bonus scheme up to date and is supervision adequate?

- Common defects are failure to review following changes in rounds, methods, equipment and actual duties (eg sorting salvage).

Expenditure per 1000 population, per tonne, per domestic hereditament (£)
Reports to Committee
Cost savings achieved
Improved standards of service
[See: Securing Further Improvements in Refuse Collection]
Bonus % basic pay
Cost per bin, per tonne, per premise
### Review questions

If there is a 'task and finish' system, what time is the task completed, eg is there considerable spare capacity?

Is there any evidence of spare time sharing, ie taking turns to have days off whilst other team members cover?

How is reserve manpower used when not needed for waste collection, eg pooling with street sweeping, parks, highways?

If collection is undertaken by contractors, do inspections confirm that agreed standards have been maintained within the contract terms?

What form do inspections take?

Are vehicle types and crew sizes the optimum for local conditions?

- A densely populated area with long walks may best be served by a large vehicle and 5-6 crew whilst a small vehicle with only 1-2 crew may be better in the country. However such situations need local assessment.

How do vehicle acquisition and maintenance costs compare with other authorities?

Are vehicles fully utilised?

How many reserve vehicles are there?

How do prices for bins, sacks etc compare with other authorities?

In assessing performance trends etc is waste collected weighed? If not, how are volumes estimated?

### Key Indicators/References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review questions</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Is there any evidence of spare time sharing, ie taking turns to have days off whilst other team members cover?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is reserve manpower used when not needed for waste collection, eg pooling with street sweeping, parks, highways?</td>
<td>Inspection reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If collection is undertaken by contractors, do inspections confirm that agreed standards have been maintained within the contract terms?</td>
<td>Vehicle costs per tonne, bin, premise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What form do inspections take?</td>
<td>Mansing per vehicle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are vehicle types and crew sizes the optimum for local conditions?</td>
<td>Vehicle operating hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A densely populated area with long walks may best be served by a large vehicle and 5-6 crew whilst a small vehicle with only 1-2 crew may be better in the country. However such situations need local assessment.</td>
<td>Reserves % fleet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do vehicle acquisition and maintenance costs compare with other authorities?</td>
<td>Cost per item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are vehicles fully utilised?</td>
<td>Vehicle costs per tonne, bin, premise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many reserve vehicles are there?</td>
<td>(See: Improving Vehicle Fleet Management in Local Government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do prices for bins, sacks etc compare with other authorities?</td>
<td>(See: Reducing the Cost of Local Government Purchases)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Waste Disposal

Introduction to the service
Waste Disposal Authorities (WDA) have a range of statutory duties and regulatory functions to ensure that waste is properly disposed of. However, the latter in particular may be undertaken by different departments within each WDA and comparisons between authorities are often complicated by this.

Broadly the WDA’s responsibilities are:

a) Surveying sources of waste and disposal facilities.
b) Preparing and maintaining a waste disposal plan in consultation with neighbouring authorities and other authorities affected.
c) Provision and management of waste disposal facilities, transfer stations, landfill sites etc, and arranging transportation.
d) Liaison with Water Authorities and other bodies concerned with the prevention and treatment of pollution.
e) Encouraging wastes recycling.
f) Research and advice on waste disposal.
g) Licensing, monitoring and enforcement of disposal site licence conditions.
h) Administration and enforcement of anti-pollution legislation.

Trends

Though there is slight movement towards disposal through contractors and by incineration, landfill is likely to remain the major final destination for Britain’s waste.

More than half the waste is collected by local authorities. A quarter comes directly from commerce and industry, and household amenity sites are a growing source of collected waste.

Real expenditure has risen slightly in the last six years as has the volume of waste disposal. However, tonnages are not yet an entirely reliable statistic because the proportion of waste weighed ranges from nil to 100%.

Expenditure
In 1985/6 county councils in England and district councils in Wales spent an estimated £192 million net on the disposal of waste (£4 per head of population).
Current management issues

The principal issues for management decision are:

1. The method and location of disposal.
2. The management of resources involved.

A well managed authority would have a long term plan for waste disposal involving the identification and preparation of future sites as well as research (by the authority, LGORU or some other agency) to determine the best means of disposal within the area. In doing so, maintaining the stability and continuity of the operation is very important.

Though there is no overall shortage of landfill sites, they are not always in places convenient to the source of the waste. Waste disposal may therefore often be a two-part operation: first the transfer station and second the transport (of most of it) to its final destination.

The choice of sites, whether for landfill or a transfer station, is rarely welcomed by those living near them. Public relations are therefore an important factor.

There is no generally applicable 'best' method of disposal. In some areas incineration may be the optimum solution, in spite of its high initial cost. Incineration still leaves some residue to be disposed of so that the incineration plant itself may be considered to be a transfer station.

The transportation of waste is a major management concern and the 'best' solution varies according to local circumstances. Much of it travels by rail (which is currently the cheapest method per tonne mile) but the balance between methods can be quite fine.

The Council should monitor disposal operations to ensure that manpower and other resources are efficiently managed at all sites within the Authority's control. At present there is a very wide range in expenditure levels for similar operations.

Apart from the transportation of waste, contracting out is still on a fairly small scale. However, subject to normal safeguards, it is an alternative to be considered.

Effectiveness will be reflected in the achievement of the Council's planned objective for waste disposal and the extent to which public complaint is minimised.

Efficiency is measured (crudely) by computing unit costs for each operation (for example landfill, transfer station, household waste site, incineration) but local constraints on the methods employed and location of disposal sites need to be borne in mind. The reliability of the statistics available is often questionable and care must be taken to ensure that comparisons are made on a consistent basis.
Bibliography

CIPFA Financial Information Service Volume 21
Includes a useful account of waste disposal methods and their problems.

Butterworth
A collection of papers on legal and technical requirements.
Performance review guide

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review questions</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Method and location of disposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a long term plan for disposal taking into account all available sites for infill and the environmental problems attached?</td>
<td>Public attitude surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For landfill it is usual for there to be a 10 years' advance plan.</td>
<td>Complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Council policy based on a recent review of the economics and other benefits/disbenefits of various alternatives for waste disposal?</td>
<td>Public enquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The 'best' alternative may not necessarily be the cheapest.</td>
<td>Responses to publicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is support for Council policies obtained from the public in localities affected?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many Household Amenity Sites are there?</td>
<td>Records of weighed waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there evidence that they are well used?</td>
<td>Number of users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If not, what steps have been taken to publicise them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Performance Review in Local Government — Environmental Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review questions</th>
<th>Key Indicators/References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Operational management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What methods of disposal are in use?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do the unit costs of these compare with similar installations and methods in other local authorities?</td>
<td>Cost per tonne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Performance is best evaluated operation by operation.</td>
<td>Tonnes per employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the Council know the costs of each operation and are these regularly monitored?</td>
<td>Existence of sound management accounting system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If unit costs are based on tonnage, is all waste weighed and volumes monitored?</td>
<td>Tonnes weighed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have alternatives been considered for service provision, eg contractors, other local authorities?</td>
<td>Committee reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any systematic recovery and sale of scrap metal, waste paper etc?</td>
<td>Income from sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Note that this may have more public relations value than economic benefits, eg bottle banks promote public interest in reclamation and tidiness.</td>
<td>Net expenditure per tonne (£)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Income may not necessarily imply the most cost effective approach. (For example, Warwickshire CC use a contract watchman who pays the Council a sum, looks after the site and has sole totting rights. This is cheaper than employing the Council's own watchman.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the arrangements for transportation of waste to landfill and other disposal sites?</td>
<td>Costs per tonne mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When were these last reviewed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The economics of transportation can be quite fine and need constant review.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stability and environmental considerations are also very important and change should not be expected purely on economic grounds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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