ACKNOWLEDGE
LEARNING FROM AUDIT, INSPECTION AND RESEARCH

STREET SCENE
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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Since everyone has contact with the street scene in some way or other, public expectations about the state of streets are high. The public wants streets to be clean, safe, attractive, and accessible. Local authorities have key roles to play...

- raising awareness of the impact of the street scene, both as a significant asset and as a major contributor to peoples’ quality of life
- working with residential and business communities, utilities and other stakeholders to increase engagement and encourage ownership of issues
- co-ordinating the services that affect the design, maintenance and management of the street scene

This report identifies four key areas for action:

1. Not all authorities are engaging users sufficiently...
   - consultation with users needs to be strengthened, especially with hard to reach groups
   - authorities need to ensure ease of movement on the streets
   - access to the council, to make enquiries or report problems, should be improved
   - information on street scene services should be up-to-date and available in appropriate formats and languages
   - the public should be given a greater role in reporting problems and improving services

2. Street scene services could be better co-ordinated...
   - the co-ordination of services reflects both what users want and the need for increased service efficiency
   - co-ordination between street scene services needs to be reflected at fundamental service design level, and not just in the binding together of separate service areas for a best value review
   - effective joint working between different agencies and single points of contact for the user have led to tangible benefits for authorities and users

3. The quality of street scene services is very variable...
   - rigorous challenge from the authority is essential to improving service quality
   - authorities that have embraced change have made improvements
   - staff are a key resource and need new technologies and sound working practices to ensure that they are skilled and motivated

4. There are serious deficiencies in the effective use of competition...
   - authorities need to undertake rigorous analysis of alternative methods of service delivery, including partnerships and outsourcing
   - the market of potential suppliers needs careful exploration, especially where more flexible or integrated contracts are required

Inspection findings across a range of street scene services have identified a number of examples of good practice, some of which are detailed in this paper. All authorities need to examine their own circumstances as part of best value reviews, to see how they can best work towards bringing quality integrated services to the public.
1. This paper is one in a series of AC Knowledge, Learning from Audit, Inspection and Research papers from the Audit Commission. These papers are based on the lessons emerging from inspection, audit and other research. This paper is intended primarily for relevant members and senior officers in local authorities who need a guide to the main issues facing street scene services – perhaps because they are involved in a best value review.

2. The main messages from this paper are summarised in a separate briefing, which highlights the key issues for leading members and chief officers, together with stakeholders in the wider world of government and relevant bodies.

3. Over 120 best value inspection reports on services relating to the street scene formed the basis for the analysis in this paper. A number of authorities have also been visited or contacted by the Commission (Appendix 1). Discussions with relevant stakeholders have been conducted and relevant national data have been analysed.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

4. The main focus of this review has been on issues arising from inspections of:
   - **Waste management and Cleansing services**, including street cleansing, refuse collection, fly tips and abandoned cars, bring sites for recycling, the management of public conveniences, and issues such as graffiti and fly posting removal.
   - **Highway services**, including highway maintenance, traffic management, street lighting and street furniture.
   - **Car parking services**.
   - **Grounds maintenance** within street scene boundaries, including weed removal.
   - **Integrated services**, involving a broader focus on combinations of the above functions.

5. Definitions of the term street scene vary. As well as the maintenance functions above, other service areas are relevant to the planning, design and broader management of the street scene, such as traffic management and urban design. In this paper we consider all the work an authority does to care for its streets. Therefore a broad definition of street scene, including both maintenance and management issues, has been adopted.

6. In carrying out this review, the Audit Commission has worked with a range of stakeholders. Their representatives, officers from local authorities and representatives of user views formed an advisory group which helped the Commission with the work (APPENDIX 1). The Institute of Public Finance carried out the analyses and produced an early draft of the paper. The Commission is very grateful for all these inputs; however, responsibility for the paper’s conclusions rests with the Commission alone.
1. WHY STREET SCENE IS AN IMPORTANT AREA

7. There are very few services that affect all of the population. However, everyone has regular contact with the street scene in some way or other, and numerous public surveys demonstrate that the state of the streets is high on the public’s list of priorities for local authorities to address. Streets provide the environment for much of our community life. Clean, safe, accessible and attractive streets are fundamental elements of an environment that is pleasant to live in.

8. Effective management of the streets contributes significantly to the ‘liveability’ agenda set out by the Prime Minister in April 2001 (Ref. 1). He explained that liveability means ‘Streets where parents feel safe to let their children walk to school. Where people want to use the parks. Where graffiti, vandalism, litter and dereliction are not tolerated. Where the environment in which we live fosters rather than alienates a sense of local community and mutual responsibility.’ Thus the liveability agenda aims to strengthen local communities, to make streets safer, cleaner and better managed and to provide high quality public spaces. Further work is being developed as part of the Spending Review 2002 process, by the cross-cutting review on ‘improving the public space’ (APPENDIX 2).

9. Streets can contribute to a wide range of aims and objectives in the different tiers of local government. For example:
   - local agenda 21 (LA21) and community planning;
   - crime and disorder;
   - social inclusion;
   - health;
   - community safety;
   - neighbourhood renewal and regeneration;
   - transportation;
   - regional development and cultural strategies; and
   - modernising local government.

10. Streets account for about 80 per cent of public space within urban areas (Ref. 2). They form a significant part of a local authority’s physical assets, and involve a broad range of authority service areas. Although numerous people have rights to use streets in various ways, authorities must take overall responsibility for stewardship of the street scene.

11. Streets attract a number of competing interests and agendas. For example, people on the move want free flowing traffic, businesses want a lively and attractive environment where people will want to spend time, and residents may want peace and security. As well as an authority’s street scene services, functions such as development control and planning, road
safety, traffic calming, transport planning and police all influence the streets. In addition to these competing agendas, there is little co-ordination or control over the current rights to do work that affects the street scene.

12. There is a growing conviction that streets have become simply routes to destinations, dominated by traffic and its infrastructure (Refs. 2, 3). This imbalance needs to be addressed and streets seen as places, destinations in their own right, for uses such as commerce or leisure. Responsibility for streets needs to be reconsidered to achieve this.

13. The street scene comprises a wide range of features, not all of which are under the control of local authorities (EXHIBIT 1). Inspection findings confirm that these features are usually managed as narrowly defined, specialist elements. Instead of managing and reconciling different components and conflicting interests, a piecemeal approach can often reinforce them. By keeping services in separate boxes, and failing to work in co-ordination with external bodies, effort is duplicated and the opportunity to respond coherently to a community’s aspirations for its shared environment is missed.

14. The knowledge base applied to street management is spread around a large number of professional and technical disciplines (Ref. 2). If combined and simplified, a holistic street management approach could be achieved, with service managers being equipped to address the street scene as a whole.

15. Despite these conflicts, the value of the street scene as an asset, and the financial and social implications of under-investment in its maintenance, design and management, are increasingly being recognised. Best value has helped to stimulate authorities to improve consultation with, and identification of the needs and aspirations of, residents, business communities and other stakeholders. Some authorities are starting to address issues in an integrated way, through broader reviews. More authorities are rethinking their priorities to ensure that adequate resources are being put into achieving and sustaining higher standards and better quality outcomes for the public. However, inspection shows that much more still needs to be done.
EXHIBIT 1 Features of the street

The street scene comprises a wide range of features.

Source: Audit Commission
2. WHAT DO THE SERVICES LOOK LIKE NOW?

16. People want streets that are pleasant, attractive, well designed and free from danger, pollution and noise (Ref. 2). They also want streets to function well, that do not contain litter and that are not being repeatedly dug up. They want diversity, with both peaceful and lively streets, and business and play streets, so that there are streets for everyone’s needs. The current state of the streets falls short of these needs and expectations (Refs. 2, 3).

17. Streets are important because they are places where communities meet and interact. However, there are serious concerns about the state of streets and public spaces, with residents using negative language such as ‘broken down’, ‘dirty’, ‘neglected’ and ‘unattractive’ to describe their experiences. Many people feel powerless to improve their environment.

18. MORI, in a recent paper for the Audit Commission, noted that user satisfaction with an authority relates directly to the authority’s most visible services, including the street scene. The key public priorities for the street scene are listed in BOX A.

BOX A  Public priorities for the street scene

REFUSE COLLECTION (street-related aspects only)

- Not leaving bins and mess on street.
- Prosecution of people who dump rubbish.

*General increase in satisfaction over last 10 years, and the highest rated of street scene services.*

STREET CLEANING

- Regular cleaning, especially in problem areas.
- Thorough cleaning, including street furniture.
- Regular emptying of bins, which have been located helpfully.
- Dog mess fines, and more bins.

*General increase in satisfaction over last 10 years, but marked decrease in satisfaction from 1998 to 2000.*

HIGHWAYS AND PAVEMENTS

- Road maintenance with fast, good quality repairs more important than building new roads.
- Pavement maintenance with quality repairs to make pavements accessible to all.

*Generally worst rated local government service and little improvement recently.*

*Source: Unpublished 1999 MORI report for the Audit Commission and follow up study in 2001 looking at public attitudes to key local services*
19. Performance indicator information shows a mixed picture of street scene services (EXHIBIT 2). Street cleanliness has not shown any marked improvement over recent years (Ref. 4). The number of public conveniences has fallen, though a higher proportion of these now have disabled and baby changing facilities. There have been recent improvements in the number of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people and slight improvements in street lighting.

INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

20. Over 120 reports relating to the street scene had been published at time of this analysis. Across the sample, the scoping of street scene reviews varied widely. Recently, a few authorities have responded to encouragement to carry out reviews with a much broader scope. Examples of more integrated approaches ranged from combining a couple of services to grouping many services under a broader theme. No single review had covered all the design, management and maintenance issues affecting the street scene, but nonetheless it is encouraging that authorities are now starting to undertake joined up reviews.

EXHIBIT 2  Trends in streetscene services

Performance indicator information shows a mixed picture of street scene services.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of highways that are of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness</th>
<th>Percentage of streetlights not working as planned</th>
<th>Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for people with disabilities</th>
<th>Number of public conveniences per 100,000 residents</th>
<th>Average number of days taken for fly tip removal</th>
<th>Percentage of dangerous damage incidents to roads and pavements repaired/made safe within 24 hours</th>
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Source: Audit Commission
21. The majority of services were judged as fair (56 per cent) or good (40 per cent) (EXHIBIT 3). No authorities received excellent judgements, and just 4 per cent were rated as poor. Fifty-seven per cent were judged likely to improve or will improve. This pattern is broadly comparable with data for all services, described in Changing Gear, the Commission’s best value annual statement for 2001 (Ref. 5).

22. Judgements for the different service areas related to the street scene show some variation from the overall distribution:
   • Grounds maintenance – higher percentage (50 per cent) judged good.
   • Highways services – lower percentage (32 per cent) judged good, but higher percentage (68 per cent) judged probably or will improve.
   • Car parking – lower percentage (32 per cent) judged good, and lower percentage (44 per cent) judged probably or will improve.

23. Inspectors identified a number of areas of weakness in street scene services. Twelve areas for improvement were listed in the recommendations of at least 20 inspections (BOX B).

EXHIBIT 3 Inspection results for street scene services

The majority of services were judged as fair or good.

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Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service
BOX B Twelve key areas of weakness

FOCUSBING ON THE USER
• Lack of user, community and outcome focus.
• Lack of consultation with users.
• Difficulties for those using the street and in accessing the council.

CO-ORDINATING SERVICES
• Narrow scope of service reviews.
• Lack of partnership working with other departments or bodies.

MANAGING QUALITY
• No rigorous challenge of service targets, processes and costs.
• Poor or absent performance management systems.
• Improvement strategy does not allow for step-change, service specific and operational change, according to local circumstance.

EMBRACING COMPETITION
• Competition is not used to provide the best service to customers.
• Little reviewing of current contracts, or planning for new contracts.

GENERAL
• No rigorous challenge of the need for service and how it is provided.
• No attempts made to seek out best practice to inform improvements.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

FOCUSBING ON THE USER

24. Inspectors noted that many councils were not sufficiently focused on user and community needs, and that consultation with users was patchy. In particular, councils were poor at consulting minority groups, such as people with disabilities and those from ethnic minorities, and at ensuring that consultation helped to provide a challenge to the service currently being provided.

25. Ease of movement on the streets and access to the council were variable. Although improvements such as an increase in the number of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people were welcomed, there were many concerns about uneven pavement and road surfaces limiting ease of movement on the street. In addition to this, there were concerns about access to the council itself, to gain information or to make complaints. A number of council buildings are some distance from public transport routes, are unwelcoming and prove difficult to navigate because of poor signage. Telephone helplines vary from being easy to use and informative to being almost impenetrable, keeping users waiting an unreasonable length of time.
26. Another area of concern was information provision. The MORI study showed that residents wanted easily accessible information on the range of street scene services, especially via leaflet, local press and council publications. Inspectors observed that many councils were failing to provide up-to-date information in a variety of formats and languages.

27. Inspectors also noted councils’ failure to get residents involved in street scene improvements. A few councils demonstrate successful education and enforcement initiatives, and ways to involve local groups. However, the majority of councils still have a long way to go in this area to reach the standards of the best.

**CO-ORDINATING SERVICES**

28. During consultation, some users expressed frustration with the multiple dimensions of street scene management, since the public perceives the street to be a single joined-up entity rather than a complex series of separate services. Despite this, the majority of authorities are not making concerted efforts to join up their services.

29. Pockets of good practice in joining up services do exist. Across the authorities analysed, services have been joined successfully at a number of levels, from links at senior level only through to multi-level teams. Tangible benefits from working with other council departments and with external agencies were noted.

**MANAGING QUALITY**

30. Inspectors noted that authorities providing a higher quality of street scene services tended to give a higher corporate profile to the street scene, to focus on user priorities, and to demonstrate strong leadership and performance management.

31. Challenge of why and how particular services were provided was weak in the majority of the authorities inspected. For example, many councils were making limited use of performance information to challenge their performance, and showed little capacity to measure or analyse their own performance. A number of authorities had weak improvement strategies, and showed a lack of vision and commitment to making changes to their services.

32. In some authorities, inefficient working practices were having a negative effect on service quality. Inspectors noted that staff were becoming de-motivated by out-of-date technology and a lack of training and development. Some staff also expressed concern about internal communications and their lack of involvement in challenging the service and shaping improvement plans.
EMBRACING COMPETITION

33. The limited application of competition in street scene services was a major concern for inspectors. The majority of authorities are not challenging methods of service delivery or investigating alternative service providers. Few authorities have procurement strategies in place, and those that exist are often incomplete. Few authorities have made rigorous attempts to analyse and consult potential suppliers. The result is that options appraisals are also weak, although some good practice does exist. Partnerships with other bodies are limited, although private finance initiatives (PFIs) are beginning to be explored.

34. On the positive side, relationships with contractors are generally good. Some authorities have developed strong, effective working relationships with existing external contractors over time, and have made good attempts to consult them about alternative ways of packaging services. However, inspectors felt that some councils could do more to explore integrated and/or outcome-based contracts with existing and potential contractors.

35. In addition to these specific issues, inspectors have general concerns about the lack of challenge demonstrated by authorities. In addition to this, although examples of good practice exist, inspection shows that authorities are not currently making sufficient use of them. The remainder of this paper presents ideas about, and evidence for, how authorities can use good practice to improve services.
This section explores in more detail the causes of variations in performance and identifies ways to improve services.

From the 12 key areas of weakness identified by inspectors (BOX B), four broad themes for improvement emerge:

- focusing on the user;
- co-ordinating services;
- managing quality; and
- embracing competition.

**FOCUSING ON THE USER**

*User focus means consulting users, improving access to services, providing essential service information and involving users in service improvements.*

Many inspections have questioned whether reviews examine services sufficiently from the user’s point of view. Inspectors often recommend user-focused changes that reviews have missed. Authorities should:

- consult users more widely to determine their needs;
- make it easy for everyone to move around on the streets;
• make the council accessible to all;
• identify appropriate and effective ways to publicise essential information; and
• involve users in service improvements.

USER CONSULTATION

38. An understanding of user needs and perceptions is the starting point for best value and for community strategies, yet consultation is often unsatisfactory. User views help councils to:
• challenge why and how a service is provided;
• identify priorities for the community (CASE STUDIES 1 & 2);
• inform difficult or controversial decisions by the authority (CASE STUDY 3, overleaf); and
• identify and address areas of conflict.

CASE STUDY 1 Community priorities

Knowsley MBC undertook extensive and wide ranging consultation, commended by the Audit Commission Inspection Service, about the need for, and standards of, their environmental services. Results showed that people considered environmental services to be key to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area.

Inspectors commented that: ‘Local people have driven environmental services toward the top of the Council’s agenda and in choosing Cleanliness of the Environment for a first year review, Knowsley have shown their willingness to respond directly to consultation and address difficult service areas. The challenge is to ensure that economic development and social progress are fully integrated with sound environmental management principles and that the overall impact of our actions has a net positive effect on the environment.’

Knowsley’s LA 21 strategy reflects the main priorities of the government at a local level and sets out the aims of the community to improve the social and environmental well-being of the area. Following consultation about user priorities, the council has adopted an environmental policy that includes the commitment to ‘take action to improve standards of cleanliness in streets and open spaces and to discourage litter, vandalism, graffiti, anti-social levels of noise pollution and other environmentally damaging activity’.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

CASE STUDY 2 Consultation influencing corporate priorities

For Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, consultation for the community plan highlighted the importance of cleanliness and tidiness to local people. In turn, the community planning exercise gave rise to the Council mission statement, and the corporate strategy has adopted the seven priorities of the community plan.

Of these priorities, the Streetwise service uses the ‘Staying Ahead’ priority as its corporate aim. ‘Staying Ahead’ provides a challenging direction by aiming to improve pride in the area and so reduce litter, graffiti and dog fouling. It offers targets for the council and the service to work towards.

Consultation also influenced the issues tackled by the best value review. In response to user views, the review grouped together a range of functions that influence the physical appearance of the Borough.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service
CASE STUDY 3  Difficult decisions and consultation

A lack of investment in refurbishing public conveniences (PCs) at Sefton Borough Council had led to a poor inspection judgement, despite the efforts of staff and managers to provide acceptable standards and improvements. Most toilets had no baby changing facilities, several had no hot water and a number did not even have cold water wash basins. Graffiti was a constant problem. Some had a reputation for illegal activities that restricted their use by law-abiding residents. Few had adequate signage. Some were locked up and inaccessible despite notices saying that they should be open. Unscheduled closures arose out of confusion among staff over terms for a particular cleaning contract.

However, public consultation then enabled the council to make some difficult and potentially controversial decisions safely:

• A shower unit was installed in a gentlemen’s toilet for homeless men, in response to concerns raised by a homeless focus group.
• The street scene inspection regime was strengthened to provide a more comprehensive check on performance.
• Members had not approved earlier proposals to close sub-standard PCs as they viewed this as a loss of local amenities. However consultation showed strong public support for rationalisation of the service to provide fewer, high quality PCs in strategically important locations. This encouraged members to initially close six PCs. Budget savings are being used to refurbish other PCs. The overall effect will be to reduce the portfolio from 31 PCs to 18.
• Members agreed to impose usage charges where it is cost effective to do so, at locations where the cost would not encourage social exclusion. Consultation confirmed that the majority of residents would be happy to pay up to 20 pence if standards were satisfactory.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

39. Recent consultation with residents of some of Britain’s most deprived areas revealed that people on low incomes are often the people worst affected by environmental problems (Ref. 6). These residents expressed most concern about issues which visibly and directly affect their immediate environment, such as litter, dog fouling and unswept streets, rather than about wider issues, such as environmental pollution. The study authors commented that cleaning up buildings, sites and streets in these areas would considerably improve residents’ quality of life.

40. There are barriers to consulting local people, and some groups are harder to reach than others. Inspectors cited examples of difficulties in reaching small groups in rural areas where there are no community organisations, and reaching members of minority groups. To increase participation, authorities need to make more use of existing centres of youth activity, religious and social networks, support groups for people with sensory deprivation, or with mobility problems, and other representative organisations/individuals. Inspectors found little evidence of this approach.

41. Advice and information on reaching such groups is available. The IDeA website offers guidance on a variety of different consultation methods (http://www.idea.gov.uk/bestvalue/consult/methods.htm). The Employers’ Organisation for Local Government, which aims to support local authorities in their human resources role, offers an online resource of authorities that are consulting disabled groups, including contact details for further information (http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk/equal-pol-dis.htm). Similarly, the home office provides guidance on consulting black and ethnic minority communities (http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/service-first/2001/consultation/bestpractice/get-it-right.pdf).
One authority that has made good progress on consulting groups with disabilities is Scarborough Borough Council, which has made use of existing networks to improve consultation and involvement of these groups (CASE STUDY 4).

The Countryside Agency’s website lists some useful information on engaging communities (http://www.countryside.gov.uk/market-towns/commpart-01.htm). The techniques were devised for market towns, but, in fact, can be applied in a much wider context. In terms of consultation, suggestions include:

- **Community planning forum** – to obtain information, generate ideas and allow communication between different sectors of the community.
- **Charette** – a debate forum that challenges citizens to examine problems and reach a consensus on appropriate solutions.
- **Open house and soap box events** – to include interactive displays with facilitators to encourage people to take part in debate.

EASE OF MOVEMENT ON THE STREET

Best value is founded on the principle that an authority’s services meet the needs of the user. On the streets, although safety, personal security, noise and the quality of the experience are important factors, the existence of suitable routes is fundamental for users.

Some improvements to ease movement on the street are already being achieved, including more pedestrian crossings with facilities for people with disabilities and more public conveniences with facilities for people with disabilities and for baby changing.

CASE STUDY 4  Consulting disabled groups

Scarborough Borough Council has made excellent progress in consulting local disabled groups about street scene services. The initiative began around three years ago, and now involves meetings every two months. Local disabled action groups, a blind and partially sighted society and a local organisation for deaf and hard of hearing people meet, together with council heads of service, to discuss the issues that the groups feel are important. For example, at one time the groups requested more dropped kerbs, and at the council’s request, provided a prioritised list of localities. Scarborough then took this to the County Council and managed to secure £30,000 for the work. Now, when the council begins work on a particular area, they engage the group to check their priorities, for example, during work on bus stops. A culture of mutual trust and approachability has been established, and the council is developing a better understanding of, and ability to, provide the key features that can improve access for such groups. The officer interviewed said ‘They now contact me directly with problems and issues, I feel able to press them about what works and doesn’t work for them, and they know that I will do what I can to help.’

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview
46. Shopping accounts for nearly one quarter of all walking trips on the streets (Ref. 3). National accessibility initiatives, such as the Shopmobility scheme, which promotes and enhances the independence of people with limited mobility, can have a significant local impact through increasing access to the street. There are well over 200 schemes currently operating in the UK. It was estimated in 1999 that over 200,000 people a year were using Shopmobility services, making over 1.5 million trips per year. With their carers and friends it was estimated that they spend at least £150 million each year.

47. Despite these improvements, much work remains to be done (Ref. 3). A 1995 survey for the National Consumer Council (Ref. 7) noted that 69 per cent of respondents mentioned at least one concern about walking around local streets, with uneven pavements topping the list (BOX C). Evidence from inspection suggests that these concerns have not been allayed since this survey, and that the problems persist.

ACCESS TO THE COUNCIL

48. In terms of access to the council, authorities are making limited use of information and communications technology (ICT). Some authorities now have dedicated phone lines during office hours, along with an out-of-hours emergency line, but few have the facility to contact services by e-mail or through council websites. One example of an accessible council is Lewisham’s Access*Point, which is a one-stop-shop for improved customer service (CASE STUDY 5).

BOX C The top ten consumer concerns about walking on the streets

- Cracked or uneven pavements (44 per cent of respondents)
- Dog mess (43 per cent)
- Too much traffic, busy roads (30 per cent)
- Vehicles parked on pavements (27 per cent)
- Bicycles ridden on pavements (20 per cent)
- No pedestrian crossings (19 per cent)
- Pavements dug up (17 per cent)
- Uncleared snow/ice/leaves (15 per cent)
- Litter and rubbish (11 per cent)
- Narrow pavements (11 per cent)

Source: National Consumer Council (Ref. 7)
CASE STUDY 5  Making services more accessible

Lewisham council, a Beacon for Accessible Services, has introduced Access*Point, a one-stop-shop offering an integrated approach to customer service. The service is delivered by 25 staff who provide access to a range of services for approximately 520 personal callers per day and over 130,000 callers a year. The services covered include highways and refuse collection. Customers come into the building and queue to have personal, rather than remote, access to council staff.

Access*Point has succeeded in addressing access problems on a number of levels:

- Opening times are convenient for customers, the service opens at 8am on Mondays, closes at 7pm on Thursdays, and is available from 9 until 5.30pm on other days. It is also open until 1pm on Saturdays.
- The location of the building is well served by public transport and is convenient for other council services.
- Following the best value review, the fast track desks, previously high and awkward for the elderly and disabled, were replaced by a much more accessible reception desk.
- A special officer to help deaf or hard of hearing customers using sign language is in post.
- Signs at the entrance to Access*Point are multilingual, as are the directions to the ticket machine which controls the queueing system.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

INFORMATION PROVISION

49. The information provided by authorities about their services has a marked effect on customer perceptions. MORI research commissioned by one city council found that customers who were unhappy about the level of service raised as a key issue a lack of clarity about what was going to happen, in what timescale and who would be dealing with their query or complaint.

50. Some authorities have made conscious decisions to provide lower or higher levels of service, according to their assessment of local needs and following consultation with service users. It is part of their role to make such decisions about services, while also meeting national standards. However, the public has the right to see information about the impact of those decisions and about how their authority compares with others. People also have the right to see information about how efficiency varies between authorities and to ask why such variations occur.

51. Good practice advice from the IDeA on information provision includes:

- making information as accessible as possible by providing it when and where it is needed and in a range of formats, including hotlines and internet access;
- providing useful, comprehensive and up-to-date information about things that are going to affect people, things that they can do something about, including an A-Z of services;
- using appropriate formats and language, including translations, Braille, audio tape, British Sign Language on video, and plain language; and
- learning from state of the art knowledge management – call centres, CD ROMS, and the internet.
52. Much information is currently gleaned from the local press and media, rather than from council sources. However, according to MORI's 2001 paper to the Audit Commission, the most popular forms of communication cited by citizens still include door-to-door leaflets and council publications. Councils can also usefully employ modern technology, such as call centres and the internet, to improve information provision. One example of a simple but effective website is that of Maldon District Council (CASE STUDY 6). This website informs users about the Waste Management services that the council offers and provides an educational resource and a way of feeding back comments to the council.

USER INVOLVEMENT

53. In addition to consultation, authorities can also involve users directly in contributing to service improvements. Citizens have responsibilities too, and the responsibility for improving services does not rest with the authority alone. However, authorities need to be proactive in encouraging positive citizen participation in making improvements, rather than waiting for the public to act of its own accord.

54. An increasing number of authorities have introduced national initiatives to involve residential and business communities in street improvements. Locally devised initiatives can also help to involve users and improve customer satisfaction. For example, the Radial Routes Impact Scheme which forms a part of the Bolton City Challenge, has made significant improvements through local artists and their mentors working with the local community and schools. Together they have designed new shop fronts, lighting, street furniture and signs. It has improved the environment for residents and made the area more attractive for business. In the London Borough of Brent, a number of initiatives to involve users have been introduced, including a Lay Monitoring Officer programme (CASE STUDY 7).

CASE STUDY 6 Information provision on the internet

Maldon District Council's website contains a range of information about its street cleansing service. The pages on street cleansing are maintained and updated by staff in the council's Waste Management section. The website is clear and easy to navigate. By clicking on 'The Environment' icon, users can access a range of simple information about the council's environmental services and initiatives. The Waste Management Services section has useful information for residents on refuse collection, recycling, street cleansing and litter. The site asks for users' help with problems such as fly tipping and dog fouling – things that residents flagged up as issues of concern during consultation. There is also a link to the Tidy Britain Group (now ENCAMS) website to allow users to access educational material. Users can send feedback to the council about its services from the website.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and council website (http://www.maldon.gov.uk)
CASE STUDY 7 Getting users involved

At the London Borough of Brent the following measures have been introduced to involve users:

- **A Lay Monitoring Officer (LMO) programme to address user concerns about the street scene.** The LMO meets with a team leader from Streetcare, the authority’s team, on a weekly basis and walks 12 streets (500 households) in an area. The purpose is to raise any street scene issues as experienced by the residents in the area, from dumped rubbish to refuse collection spillage. From a resident perspective the programme has proved effective in delivering improvements on the ground.

- **Pilot schemes in response to user concerns** For example, the concept of anti-graffiti partnership zones was fed through the Environment Scrutiny Committee and funding of £100,000 was agreed. Representation from area fora, the council, police, businesses, schools and youth organisations was secured. The service is working with spray can retailers to encourage a code of practice where spray cans are kept behind the counter and are not sold to those under 18. Youth offenders are also being involved to work on graffiti removal and are diverted away from graffiti to work on murals in conjunction with an art teacher from a local school. Murals are being applied to empty high street sites to improve the appearance of the street scene and to discourage graffiti.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

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**55.** Education and enforcement also form an important part of getting users involved in a service (CASE STUDY 8, overleaf). A number of national initiatives exist to help authorities to do this, such as The Tidy Britain Group’s Eco-Schools and People & Places programmes.

- **Eco-schools** is a European environmental award programme for schools. It involves pupils in decision-making about the environmental management of their schools. The committees involved tackle a range of environmental improvements according to their priorities.

- **The People & Places programme** not only involves local authorities, but also private organisations and statutory undertakers. It aims to improve the local environment through appraisal, development, action, enforcement and education. Key elements include regular information bulletins, a Network newsletter and the annual conference and awards.

**56.** The Placecheck model from the Urban Design Alliance (UDAL) involves users in assessing what is good and bad about a street and what improvements might be made (Ref. 2, APPENDIX 2). Professionals can do the assessment, but UDAL recommends that it is best done by a partnership formed between the local community and professionals, so that the community feels a sense of ownership for the ideas generated. UDAL, with BBC London Live and TimeBank, piloted ‘Changing Streets’, a people’s movement to improve the appearance of streets, in London during 2001. Individuals and authorities contacted TimeBank for an action pack, including a guide to running a Placecheck, invitation cards and posters, action plan cards and feedback cards. These packs are still available from TimeBank’s campaign website (http://www.timebank.co.uk), and it is hoped that authorities outside London will begin to develop their own campaigns.

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1. Now ENCAMS, or Environmental Campaigns, the umbrella group for the Tidy Britain Group and Going for Green.

2. Statutory undertakers are defined as companies that provide utilities and communications and are licensed by the government to install and maintain cables and pipes under the street.
CASE STUDY 8  Education and enforcement

Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council carries out an extensive programme of waste and environmental awareness raising activities, as well as enforcement. At the time of the best value inspection, 12 of the borough’s schools were involved in The Tidy Britain Group’s Eco-schools programme, and Bolton has a specific programme officer working with schools and in deprived areas on waste and environmental issues. Another example of environmental awareness raising includes a network of ‘roadside care’ schemes. The council provides equipment, such as gloves, rubbish bags and skips. Organisations including local clubs, businesses and schools, then send out volunteers at least three times a year to clean up the roadside. Some groups also participate in improvements such as bulb planting.

The council also works with the private sector. For example it has an education partnership with Greater Manchester Waste Ltd, where part of the premises have been converted to two education rooms for schools.

On enforcement of dog fouling prosecution, the council sought and obtained support from local magistrates and £500 fines are imposed. A new ‘pooper scooter’ designed to remove dog fouling is supported by this enforcement. Enforcement officers work alongside street cleansing crews in problem areas, delivering leaflets about the law prior to commencing prosecution.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

57. Authorities need to be aware that as people become more informed and involved with services, expectations may rise and satisfaction rates may fall. One example of this is a London Borough that has introduced two refuse collections per week and is investing additional resources in exceeding Environmental Protection Act (EPA 1990) standards for street cleansing. While such initiatives in response to public demand have been well received, some drops in satisfaction levels have been noted which, after investigation, the council has attributed to raised expectation levels.

58. This is a key issue when comparing satisfaction levels, but should not deter authorities from pursuing step-change and continuous improvements. The important lesson is to avoid raising public expectations unrealistically, by giving customers clear information about which issues can be acted on, and by explaining the reasons for not being able to act on some other expectations.

SERVICE SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

59. Inspectors identified a range of methods used by authorities to increase community engagement, improve access to specific services, and respond to customer requirements (BOX D).
BOX D Service specific ways to increase user focus

RECYCLING BANKS
• Giving information about site locations on websites.
• Improving signage, including clear contact numbers for users to report untidiness, fly tipping and banks requiring emptying.
• Encouraging community commitment to keep sites clean.

CAR PARKING
• Keeping public information up-to-date and making it widely available.
• Making methods of payment flexible, for example, pay on exit and providing change from machines.
• Ensuring that pricing structures are not over-complicated.
• Reviewing charging policies, to ensure that community benefits are being maximised and to identify any disadvantages that need to be addressed.

STREET CLEANSING
• Scheduling cleaning to follow refuse collections and grass cuts.
• Weekend cleaning when the use of town centres is at its highest.
• Sweeping main roads before 8am, that is, before many people go to work, creating an immediate impression that streets are clean.
• Holding schedules for street cleansing at receptions/one-stop-shops, to enable an immediate response to be given to enquiries, and using the internet to keep people informed.
• Employing parish litter pickers and paying them a small remuneration. This will save time that is currently spent by urban litter pickers travelling to villages in large rural areas.
• Using offenders on community service in street cleansing, for example, Helping Hands at Leeds and Wirral.
• Cleaning shrub beds more regularly than just when pruning.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

60. By consulting users, improving access to streets and to the council, providing relevant information, and involving the community in street scene improvements, authorities will develop a better understanding of user needs and expectations. Authorities need to take action in a number of areas (CHECKLIST 1, overleaf). Progress in this area will allow authorities to challenge service provision and inform tough decisions on which areas to prioritise when conflicts arise.
CHECKLIST 1  Focusing on the user

AUTHORITIES SHOULD:

• Consult users to obtain a clear picture of how people relate to their streets and of what their needs are. Make more use of existing networks to access hard to reach groups.
• Focus on improving ease of movement on the streets.
• Increase access to the council, making the most of modern technology.
• Ensure that essential service information is provided in a variety of formats, from traditional methods, such as leaflets, through to call centres and websites.
• Encourage user participation in reporting problems and helping to improve services, for example, leader/community schemes, voluntary cleaning up days, graffiti notification and removal.

CO-ORDINATING SERVICES

Co-ordinated services better reflect user perspectives of an integrated street, and can increase efficiency.

61. Co-ordinating street scene services can help to improve service delivery through increased efficiency and effectiveness. It can also better reflect the customer view of the street as an integrated unit, and means that there are fewer joining points between different service teams for things to go wrong. The extent to which the services link can vary from some co-ordination across particular services at particular levels within an authority, to complete integration of services across a broad range of services and levels, perhaps by bringing many functions together in a single department.

62. A number of authorities have found that benefits can be achieved when the co-ordination of services is improved. These include:

• a clearer focus on user perceptions, needs and outcomes;
• increased customer satisfaction and easier resolution of problems;
• improved performance and workflow;
• less bureaucracy and duplication, and so greater potential savings;
• sharing of information and learning; and
• greater flexibility.
63. The Commission recognises that co-ordination is not always easy to achieve. Inspectors note that authorities have encountered barriers, such as conflicting agendas of different parties, difficulties in identifying areas for potential linkage and resistance of staff at various levels. Despite this, with commitment and enthusiasm from the top, and good communication through all levels, some authorities are making progress with joining up street scene initiatives.

64. Authorities need to decide which parts of their street scene services would benefit from better co-ordination and which parts could be completely integrated to improve service delivery. There is no ‘one size fits all’ model, and a range of options exists to improve co-ordination. Authorities need to carry out a robust analysis of these options before deciding which model best meets their criteria for achieving street scene improvements.

65. Possible options for achieving better co-ordination include:
- joined-up working with different agencies;
- a single point of contact for the public; and
- co-ordination at different levels within a council.

JOINED-UP WORKING

66. At present, complex legislation deals with the street as a series of unrelated components and disconnected activities. One of the recommendations from the UDAL Designing Streets for People Inquiry is that joined-up working between decision-makers, along with improved links between single-focus agencies, organisations and plans, would raise the standard of maintenance and help to ensure that streets and public spaces appear cared for (Ref. 2).

67. Although the state of the streets may be an authority priority, this is not always the case for the statutory undertakers and private landowners in the area. This is a key issue, as the effects of poor co-ordination of street design, management and maintenance are usually highly visible and will affect the public perception of service quality. Current legislation does not give authorities direct control over the co-ordination of work carried out by statutory undertakers, and this can create a real barrier to sustained improvements (Ref. 2).

68. Authorities have made attempts to work with other bodies in a joined-up way, but there are some difficult issues to negotiate. One London borough found that imposing a planning condition to ensure that all hoardings have diagonal slats fitted stopped fly posting in many areas. However, hoardings around a Railtrack site are outside their control and regularly attract fly posting. The authority therefore had to rely on passing on a recommendation and hoping that it would be acted upon, which had not always been the case. One district council attempted to negotiate an agreement with a local fast food restaurant to better manage the litter generated there. The restaurant acknowledged the problem and placed some litter drums in the area concerned. However, early promises of extra litter pickings by the restaurant did not materialise and the problem has not really been solved, to the continued frustration of local residents. Councils acknowledge that through negotiation and long-term relationship building it is possible to address this type of problem, but it is not easy and requires patience and persistence.
69. There is considerable public pressure to ease disruption on roads. The lack of joint working between highway authorities and statutory undertakers is seen by some as being a contributory factor to disruptions. The National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) represents the main utilities’ interests in street works and related matters. NJUG facilitates co-operative working between utilities, highway authorities and others, and has introduced Streetwise, a programme of practical steps to minimise disruption (BOX E).

70. Joint working between authorities is important, in order to explore the potential benefits of increased sharing of resources and to increase awareness of the effects of certain actions on adjoining authorities. For example, a purge on fly tipping or fly posting in one authority area can result in such problems simply being shifted to an adjoining authority. Although some authorities have been discouraged from joint working by the differing views, aims and approaches of their neighbours, other authorities have built successful partnerships. Inspectors found several examples of joint working between county councils and city councils, such as work on highway maintenance in Cambridgeshire and in Derbyshire.

SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

71. User consultation by a number of authorities has shown that a single point of contact for several or all street scene services is seen by residents as desirable. Users are commonly irritated by systems for separate services, commenting that accessing the council to report problems or pursue enquiries becomes much too complicated with more than one contact point.

72. There is limited mention of effective single access points in the street scene related inspection reports. However, where good practice exists, authorities have demonstrated benefits, such as easier access for users and reduced bureaucracy for authorities (CASE STUDY 9).

BOX E Streetwise – Essential services, responsible sites

Streetwise is a programme of practical steps to minimise disruption caused by essential street and road works. It involves commitment to the following six themes:

COMMUNICATION – identify Streetwise sites clearly, keep the public informed about the works and encourage them to inform the utility concerned if any site fails to meet the Streetwise Charter.

COORDINATION – discuss long-term plans with highway authorities and give them maximum possible advance notice so that they can fulfil their duty to co-ordinate works.

SAFETY – meet safety requirements including signing, lighting and guarding, and to keep sites as tidy as possible.

DURATION – complete works within the agreed timescale.

ENVIRONMENT – conduct all work so as to minimise its environmental impact.

INNOVATION – continue to develop and use new techniques and working practices to reduce disruption.

Source: NJUG website (http://www.njug.org.uk)
CASE STUDY 9  Single point of contact

In Crewe and Nantwich the aim of the Streetwise services review was clear and practical. They sought to integrate services and provide a single point of contact for the community. Although the current service had only recently been established it was noted that all staff from the previous client and contractor areas were now based together in one office, allowing for improved communications.

Combined administration arrangements for street cleansing, including abandoned cars and grounds maintenance, had created a single point of contact for the public. Those staff who were interviewed were clearly willing to work closely with each other. Some of the early benefits of this related to service delivery, notably a reduction in bureaucracy allowing greater flexibility to solve problems on the ground quickly.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

73. One example of single points of contact is the Neighbourhood and Street Wardens initiative from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Neighbourhood wardens provide a uniformed, semi-official presence in a residential area. They may patrol, provide concierge duties and act as ‘super caretakers’. They promote community safety, assist with environmental improvements and housing management and contribute to community development. Neighbourhood wardens are supervised by a scheme manager and have the support of local residents and key agencies, like the police. Street wardens build on the Neighbourhood Wardens Programme and provide highly visible uniformed patrols in towns and village centres, public areas and neighbourhoods. Their role places more emphasis on caring for the physical appearance of the area. They tackle environmental problems, such as litter, graffiti and dog fouling, and are also intended to deter antisocial behaviour, reduce the fear of crime and foster social inclusion.

74. UDAL has developed the principle of a single point of contact considerably. It suggests that single points of contact should be introduced for all street management and stewardship issues (Ref. 2). The suggestion is ambitious – that the local authority area be divided into neighbourhoods, and a single individual or team be given consolidated powers to make decisions on, and promote the interests of, that community (EXHIBIT 4). These ‘neighbourhood managers’ would work in partnership with local elected members in striving to improve the liveability of the local streets, within the strategic objectives of the authority. To reach a point where such a scheme could be achieved would require a significant rethinking of corporate systems and priorities.
DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CO-ORDINATION

75. Co-ordination across services within an authority can work at a number of levels. Some authorities have chosen to co-ordinate services at a senior level and others have established multidisciplinary operational teams (CASE STUDIES 10 & 11). The benefits of these approaches to the customer are evident in faster response times to reported problems and noticeably improved public spaces. For the authority, co-ordination allows the potential to improve efficiency, pool resources and raise standards.

CASE STUDY 10 Co-ordination at senior levels

Although the City of Sunderland’s services are broadly integrated at senior manager level, each aspect of the service still works independently. Service improvements have come from reallocated budgets which allowed additional cleaning to take place outside traditional shift patterns. This generated unsolicited praise from the public. Managers make a written response to all service calls from elected members, and they are now able to report that as a result of the new teams being introduced most issues are cleared ‘same day’.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview
CASE STUDY 11 Co-ordination at multiple levels

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council has created an integrated service that looks after public open spaces in the Borough and responds directly to local community priorities. The overall vision is to achieve ‘litter, debris and detritus-free roads and pavements along with tidy grassed areas and hedges with all trees and shrubs pruned’. The review aim was ‘about not just providing an effective and efficient service but also an integrated one’.

Neighbourhood Pride teams now handle all the operations of street cleansing, grounds maintenance and aspects of council housing, with a team attached to each of the Borough’s Area Forums. Mechanical road sweeping is separate, but operates according to the same principles as Neighbourhood Pride.

Each team provides the necessary range of skills by incorporating workers from all the former services, and individuals within each team are trained in new skills as is necessary to meet local requirements. The Council merged the former client and contractor roles into a single operation and created a temporary unified grading structure pending the introduction of single status.

The contract specifications for each of the former services have been carried over as a basic input specification for Neighbourhood Pride. But these are subordinate to a set of output specifications and local supervisors have the authority to vary the amount of work that is done in order to achieve the required results. The budgets are effectively pooled, and resources can be used as necessary, so long as the required performance is achieved. Teams are encouraged to deal with problems when they see them, rather than wait until the normal season or next scheduled slot. The teams also report highway and lighting defects as they find them.

The key performance indicator is public satisfaction. Local supervisors regularly attend meetings of the Area Forums to discuss service priorities with local people and to assess whether they are being met. Wherever possible, problems are dealt with immediately; otherwise supervisors reach agreement with local forum officers about how and when they will be tackled.

The service was initially launched with its own telephone number. The customer interface has now been developed to offer an online report form that automatically generates a work note for the appropriate team. This, in turn, provides a means of recording the actual work that has been done and feeds both the financial management and performance management systems.

Barnsley is not yet able to fully quantify improvements but the new service has generated a significant increase in service calls since it started in April 2001, compared with previous levels. More work is now being done, it is to a higher standard, and public spaces are noticeably cleaner. There has been an increase in unsolicited positive feedback from the public and Neighbourhood Pride has had much positive coverage in the local press.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

76. Co-ordinated street scene services better reflect the public’s view of the street as an integrated unit, and allow resource sharing to raise the standard of service delivery. Authorities need to take action in a number of areas (CHECKLIST 2, overleaf).
CHECKLIST 2 Co-ordinating services

AUTHORITIES SHOULD:

• Explore in detail how to improve the co-ordination of street scene services, on a local and a regional basis.
• Increase joint working with other bodies to share ideas and resources, reduce duplication and improve efficiency.
• Consider whether a single point of contact for users could provide a better service and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and administration for the authority.
• Decide on the most appropriate level of co-ordination for maximum efficiency, for example, co-ordinate across all staff levels as opposed to senior levels only.

MANAGING QUALITY

The quality of street scene services varies. Strong leadership, good performance management, capacity and a willingness to change are essential ingredients for service improvement.

77. Authorities are increasingly recognising the impact that the street scene can have on a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues. However, in some authorities current strategies may need to be reviewed to check whether sufficient recognition, priority and resources are being given to achieving street scene improvements.

78. A wide range of factors, including the economy, geography, demography, culture and political environment in which a local authority operates, can affect the quality of the street scene. For example, variations introduced by the impact of tourism, employment patterns and leisure facilities can have a significant impact. There are sometimes genuine reasons for it being more difficult or expensive to provide certain services in some areas than others. However, even within a group of comparable authorities, levels of performance for a given expenditure vary significantly.

79. Authorities that are providing a high-quality service tend to be those that value and give a higher profile to the street scene, that focus on user priorities, and that can demonstrate strong leadership and good performance management. Those judged as providing poorer quality services tend to either lack the capacity or systems to improve, or they have not been
sufficiently challenging their services. They may lack the vision or conviction to tackle the conflicting objectives and difficult choices that need to be made to achieve street scene improvements.

80. A number of factors are key to improving the quality of street scene services:
   • performance management, measurement and analysis;
   • working practices;
   • willingness to change;
   • maximising resources; and
   • managing conflict.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT, MEASUREMENT AND ANALYSIS

81. The need for more robust performance management systems has been identified as a key area for improvement in a significant number of street scene inspections. Authorities currently use a mix of national performance indicator (PI) data, family group comparisons and other benchmarking comparisons. There are varying degrees of success and consistency regarding authorities’ ability to use meaningful data to achieve and monitor year-on-year improvements, to measure efficiency and to drive improvement. PIs can also be used to identify ways of joining up services to achieve better outcomes.

82. Current PIs and top quartile data reflect individual service-based ways of working. They may not encourage a focus on broader outcomes, and do not give the public a feel for the whole street scene experience. A street may be kept clean, but if it is regularly dug up with patch repairs, is damaged by the way vehicles park and is affected by adjoining sites that are unsightly, the overall impression will not be good. Currently, there are no joined-up or holistic performance indicators for the street scene, as these would be very difficult to design reliably. However, the use of public satisfaction indicators can give a broader picture of performance across street scene services.

83. There is a clear need to consider increasing the use of local PIs that are more user focused and that can give the public a clearer perspective about the overall quality of street scene services in their area. Examples of the wide range of local performance indicators in use can be found in the Local Library of Performance Indicators website (http://www.local-pi-library.gov.uk). Examples of authorities that are developing local PIs include Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Shropshire County Council (CASE STUDIES 12 & 13).

CASE STUDY 12 Measuring local performance

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council has developed a main performance indicator of customer satisfaction, measured through area fora. The council has also developed a set of output and outcome measures with actual performance information collected routinely as part of the re-engineered workflow processes. Outputs are reported on a ‘traffic light’ system, and any ‘red lights’ attract immediate management attention. Standards and targets are reviewed quarterly to ensure that they are relevant.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service
CASE STUDY 13  Education and enforcement targets

Shropshire County Council has developed a wide range of targets and indicators that relate to education and enforcement. They include reducing road traffic accident casualties, increasing cycling and walking, improving provision for people with disabilities, reducing the number of children travelling to school by car and implementing lorry routes, pilot ‘home zones’ and pilot ‘quiet lanes’.

Records of the numbers of people walking into Shrewsbury show that significant progress is being made. Having set the target of increasing the proportion of pedestrians by ten per cent in ten years (between 1996 and 2005) the results show that there was a seven per cent increase in the first three years.

The Council also monitors travel to school through its Safer Routes to Schools and School Travel Plan programmes. This shows an increase in those walking and cycling and a corresponding drop in those travelling by car or bus. The Council is not just looking at technical solutions to problems, but is successfully working to change people’s behaviour.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service

84. Some authorities expressed uncertainty about knowing where to look for comparative performance information, finding the time to access and analyse data, and knowing how to interpret data. This is a key issue with such a high percentage of authorities being recommended to demonstrate clearer strategies for achieving top quartile performance. Some useful sources of information are included in the references and websites at the end of the paper.

85. Guidance on performance measurement is not always followed. One authority reported an overall level of street cleanliness very close to 100 per cent every year. However, in reality only a small and unrepresentative proportion of the borough had been sampled to produce this figure. The guidance for this PI states clearly that ‘the sample programme must be representative of the whole authority in terms of the location of the streets and the balance of the streets in each zone’.

86. A significant number of authorities are employing external frameworks to measure how effective their services are. For example, the EFQM Excellence Model, is widely used to link processes and outcomes (http://www.idea.gov.uk/bestvalue/made-to-measure.pdf). Many others have gained, or are seeking, external recognition such as Investors in People, Charter Mark and ISO 9000. Awards of this type can be good for staff morale and give the public confidence that good practices are being followed. They also bring a robust and independent external challenge to working practices, which can help to improve service quality. However, they should not replace a thorough best value review and rigorous challenge of the services provided.

87. Some authorities have engaged the services of the Tidy Britain Group1 to provide an independent assessment of street cleansing standards. A measuring tool called the Local Environmental Quality Survey (LEQS) was piloted during 2001, and it is anticipated that it will be available for general use from April 2002 (APPENDIX 2). LEQS provides information about aspects of the local environment that are important to local people, and will enable authorities to accurately monitor local environmental quality service performance.

1 Now ENCAMS, or Environmental Campaigns, the umbrella group for Tidy Britain Group and Going for Green.
Another method that some authorities use to assess their streets is a ‘walking audit’ by the Living Streets initiative (APPENDIX 2). Using a checklist, Living Streets consultants, together with community representatives if desired, analyse key walking routes and their good and bad characteristics. The findings are presented in report form, with specific recommendations for action. Living Streets can also train authority staff to conduct the audits themselves.

WORKING PRACTICES

Authorities should continuously look at ways to ‘work smarter’. In particular, inspectors highlight that some staff have become quickly de-motivated by inefficient working practices, outdated ICT, skills shortages and poor internal communication. Increased investment in training and development and the provision of more effective tools for carrying out tasks can substantially improve morale and service quality. One example of a council that has improved the quality of services through changes in working practice is Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (CASE STUDY 14).

Being flexible and adapting services to meet needs has resulted in substantial increases in user satisfaction. For example, Sunderland City Council has rapid response teams that work later hours, to provide clean-up services at the end of the day when they are most needed (CASE STUDY 15, overleaf).

When addressing service problems, authorities need to take a structured and systematic approach to assessing the street scene. Authorities are generally good at finding solutions to problems, but inspectors note that these solutions tend to cure the symptoms rather than address the root of the problems. Although these solutions may be effective in the short term, the problem returns eventually. To prevent this, the problem-solving process needs to relate back to the issue of involving the public in improvements (Paragraphs 53-58).

WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

Ownership of problems and a willingness to change is a key building block for best value (Ref. 5). In particular, better performing authorities demonstrate:

• members and top managers that are committed to continuous improvement;
• a willingness to take (and stick to) tough decisions, and tackle difficult problems; and
• enthusiasm for external and internal challenge, and an openness about performance and problems.

CASE STUDY 14 Working smarter

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council carried out a successful pilot to improve the quality of service standards in an area which, despite a high level of investment, suffered from a poor level of environmental cleanliness and other social issues, such as stolen cars, fly-tipping and vandalism. Retraining of staff, changed working practices, and investment in further environmental and security improvements resulted in noticeable improvements. The staff resources during the pilot were comparable with the previous operation, but by mechanising the service and ‘working smarter’ the authority was able to increase the quality of service delivery.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service
**CASE STUDY 15  Rapid response teams**

Sunderland City Council has reduced the number of complaints it receives about street cleanliness by combining local rapid response teams with later working times.

Each of the City’s six areas now has its own rapid response team that works according to the priorities of the local Area Committee, as well as responding to urgent needs and dealing with much of the fly tipping. This enables the conventional cyclical work teams to complete their planned work. Local managers also attend tenants and residents forums and have the freedom to adjust work priorities to accommodate persistent problems.

The rapid response teams work from 12am to 8pm so that they can clear up after heavy daytime litter generators, such as schools and fast food outlets, preventing the litter from remaining throughout the evening and following morning. Their target is to deal with complaints within four hours.

A planned pilot partnership also aims to use Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to provide resources, operating under a service level agreement that will respond quickly to problems raised by the Police in one area of the City. By visibly tackling problems such as graffiti, litter and drug paraphernalia, the aim is to improve community well-being and reduce the fear of crime.

*Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview*

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93. In some street scene services, inspectors noted that weak strategies for performance improvement existed, and that officers were resistant to organisational change. Innovation and accountability were perceived as key ingredients for success, and authorities seen to have risk averse or blame cultures should be aware of the deterrent effects that such approaches can have on efforts to achieve excellence. In the absence of clear corporate vision and commitment to change, inspectors judged that services would not, or would be unlikely to, improve.

**MAXIMISING RESOURCES**

94. Properly skilled, committed and well-motivated staff play a vital role in service improvement. Authorities need to ensure that staff are equipped with the necessary tools to excel at their jobs, including up-to-date technology and appropriate training and development. One example of equipping staff with up-to-date technology to improve services is the London Borough of Brent, which has given staff hand held computers and a new call logging system (CASE STUDY 16).

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**CASE STUDY 16  Improved enquiry logging**

In the London Borough Of Brent, technologies such as hand held personal computers for officers and a call logging system at the one-stop-shop have been introduced. This allows enquiries to be logged by postcode, which increases the accuracy of service delivery and ensures speed when monitoring progress. Focus group discussions with users confirmed improvements in the service delivered to residents.

*Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service*
95. A number of inspectors commended the attitude and commitment of staff to providing a high quality service. However, areas of weakness relating to staff included:

- a lack of understanding of authority priorities, service plans and improvement plans, especially in terms of how each staff member can contribute;
- poor communication and lack of consultation;
- poor understanding of performance information, and how to collect and analyse it; and
- poor planning in deploying appropriately skilled staff to particular tasks, and a lack of training.

96. Authorities need to take steps to ensure that staff are properly consulted and informed about authority and service priorities, for example, via intranets, newsletters, workshops, or questionnaires. Staff also need to be trained in how to collect and analyse performance information, as well as other essential skills for their posts, from general management through to specifics, such as recognition of littering offences.

97. Members are a key resource and have important roles to play in street scene strategies, such as co-ordination or integration, user focus, continuous improvement strategies and alternative forms of service delivery. Members also need to receive appropriate training, whether this is through formal schemes or perhaps by simply being walked round streets to gauge the impact of their decisions.

98. Higher levels of spending do not always lead to service improvements. Some services that have shown a marked improvement recently have not received additional funds. However, inspectors have identified a few cases where there is an essential need to spend more to improve standards. This is backed up by a recent local transport survey (Ref. 8) which shows that a £4.7 billion backlog of expenditure was needed for highway maintenance in 2000/01.

MANAGING CONFLICTS

99. The breadth of street scene services means that a wide variety of authority and community priorities can be addressed by the services involved. However, while a service may be addressing one priority, this is sometimes at the expense of another.

100. For example, one district council’s car parking service was commended for contributing to the council’s wider strategic aims in respect of LA 21, and developing links between the service and community safety issues. However, a number of conflicts were generated. The policy of charging disabled users, while generating income, contradicted attempts elsewhere within the council to promote social inclusion. New car parking fees had an adverse effect on visitor and resident shopper numbers, which threatened to counter initiatives to boost the local economy.

101. Even within one stakeholder group, conflicts occur that need to be managed. Within a council, members and staff may have differing views and aims, and within a community, different users will also have diverse needs and expectations. Some authorities have demonstrated that it is possible to reach a compromise and come up with creative solutions that suit all parties concerned. For example, in the London Borough of Richmond, conflict between car owners and those wanting clean streets has been resolved by a programme of special cleaning (CASE STUDY 17, overleaf).
CASE STUDY 17 Managing differing user needs

In the London Borough Of Richmond Upon Thames, difficulties were being experienced in cleaning areas where cars were regularly parked. For some residents, cleaning was the priority, which conflicted with others’ priority of parking.

By way of a solution, special cleaning is now applied to almost one half of the borough. It is undertaken not more than twice per year and prior warning of cleaning is given. A traffic order must be in place before the operation is carried out. A borough-wide order is implemented through the placing of no parking cones and signs in streets 24 hours before the parking prohibition takes effect. Residents are notified three weeks before by letter and again on the day before, when letters are also placed on parked cars. If parking restrictions are not adhered to, cars are removed.

The system has proved very effective in achieving a deep clean in areas with high levels of pavement parking and was seen as a positive scheme by residents interviewed in a focus group.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

102. There will, of course, be occasions when different aims cannot be satisfied with a compromise. In these cases, authorities must be prepared to take hard decisions about which policies to prioritise.

103. High quality services require rigorous performance management, measurement and analysis, as well as efficient working practices. Authorities need to demonstrate a willingness to change, and to invest appropriately in their staff. Conflicting needs and expectations should be carefully prioritised, and relationships with stakeholders must be built over time. Authorities need to take action in a number of areas (CHECKLIST 3).

CHECKLIST 3 Managing quality

AUTHORITIES SHOULD:

• Use PIs and other measurements more effectively to benchmark and drive improvement. Develop local PIs that focus on user outcomes relating to the whole of the street scene.
• Build capacity to improve through efficient working practices, updated ICT, targeted training, and joint working with other organisations.
• Demonstrate willingness to change, embrace innovation and take appropriate risks, and accept occasional failure.
• Evaluate and maximise existing resources. Ensure that staff are fully equipped with the skills and technology needed to maximise their performance.
• Ensure that staff understand their roles in service improvement, and keep them informed via appropriate communication channels.
• Manage conflicting aims, and take tough decisions about which areas to prioritise.
• Negotiate improvements with other organisations, where necessary.
EMBRACING COMPETITION

Street scene services show serious failures in addressing competition. A structured and rigorous approach to competition is essential to best value and service improvement.

104. The majority of street scene inspections have raised serious concerns over the failure to properly review competitiveness and challenge methods of service delivery. Street scene services have discrete elements (operational, professional and administrative), and authorities should be rigorously evaluating alternative service provision and procurement options, including different ways of packaging the broad range of services. At present there is inadequate consideration of in-house versus outsourced service provision.

105. The Audit Commission’s Competitive Procurement paper aims to help authorities to become more effective at procurement (Ref. 9). It is designed to be an aid to self-evaluation for those responsible for procurement at corporate or departmental level. The paper also contains references for a number of national procurement reports and good procurement practice guides that have been produced recently. This section covers current practice in street scene services, rather than attempting comprehensively to cover the procurement process.

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

106. Procurement strategies are currently being reconsidered by many authorities. However at present few strategies exist, and where they do they are generally incomplete or untested. The Byatt report sets out the contents for a successful procurement strategy (Ref. 10 and BOX F, overleaf).

SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

107. Specialist skills are required in order for authorities to embrace procurement (Ref. 11 and BOX G, overleaf). Ideally these skills need to be developed in-house, although in small authorities they may need to be bought in. Inspectors observed that most authorities currently have a deficiency of these skills.
BOX F  The recommended contents of a procurement strategy

- General procurement principles and methods.
- Updated information on the procurement activities of the council.
- The strategic aims of the authority and their relevance to procurement activities.
- An analysis of key goods and services and their costs.
- Information on how goods and services are purchased.
- Details of current contracts with renewal/replacement dates.
- Recent and planned best value reviews.
- Future procurement exercises anticipated by the authority.
- The performance of key suppliers.
- The structure and performance of the procurement function.
- Skills and training needs.
- Issues of probity and good governance.

*Source: The Byatt Report (Ref. 10)*

BOX G  The skills required for effective procurement

- Strategic thinking to see the potential for improvements in the service.
- Project management with drive and commitment to convert strategic vision into a practical scheme.
- Financial expertise to establish the business case and to understand the costs of the scheme.
- Legal skills to understand the details of the contract documentation.
- Negotiation skills to bring the scheme to a satisfactory conclusion.
- Contract management skills to ensure that the service delivers as intended once the scheme is operational.

*Source: Competitive Procurement (Ref. 11)*

MARKET CONSULTATION AND ANALYSIS

108. Consultation with potential suppliers is important in order to determine what services could be delivered by whom. Few authorities are making rigorous efforts to consult potential suppliers. Many choose to communicate with the supply market on paper or by telephone rather than through meetings, open days or workshops. However, good practice does exist in pockets. For example, at the London Borough of Richmond, the Chair of the Environment Committee and staff spent time discussing specification and contract packaging with potential bidders for the street cleansing service. Individual meetings were held with external providers to encourage them to submit bids, and their comments were used to inform the specification.

109. It is important that authorities keep an open mind about the market at this early stage. They should consider a range of suppliers, including the private sector, other public sector bodies and voluntary organisations.
OPTIONS APPRAISAL

110. Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) resulted in a number of street scene services being left as in-house operations. In a number of authorities, the situation has not moved on since then. Equally, for some services that were outsourced under CCT, the authority has now opted to bring the service back in-house to minimise costs, with a vague promise to explore externalisation at some later date. Inspectors have observed that, although some in-house services provide a good quality service and have built capacity to improve, often they fall down on the challenge element of best value by failing to conduct a rigorous options appraisal leading to a ‘make or buy’ decision.

111. Although a number of authorities did undertake some form of option appraisal, inspectors noted that these appraisals were generally incomplete. Many were also subjective, for example, including a risk/benefit analysis but lacking an analysis of cost implications and an analysis of the extent of tasks involved. Once again, there are pockets of good practice, for example, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (CASE STUDY 18).

PARTNERSHIPS

112. A few authorities have explored street scene-related partnerships with other authorities, but have discovered that they can be difficult to set up and sustain if there are conflicting political aims and objectives. For example, one district council explored putting in place joint contracts with neighbouring districts, but was forced to abandon the idea due to variations in contractual arrangements, timescales and differing views that could not be resolved.

113. Newport County Borough Council has been trialling a partnership with a neighbouring authority on highway maintenance. This has produced improvements in the quality of the service, although evaluation of the cost has not yet been completed (CASE STUDY 19, overleaf).

CASE STUDY 18 Rigorous options appraisal

At Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council a number of different procurement options were identified for different parts of the Tidy Barnsley review. These included education, enforcement, town centre cleansing, graffiti removal, mechanical sweeping and Neighbourhood Pride teams. The options considered were no provision, restructuring/improving internal provision, formation of trust/partnerships with voluntary and private sector bodies, market testing and externalisation. To assess these options a range of criteria was used, including whether each option would:

- deliver sustainable development;
- meet legislative standards and best value criteria;
- maximise opportunities for partnership;
- be risky; and
- be easy to transfer to.

Inspectors commented that this methodology allowed a wide range of procurement options to be explored and the most suitable options for the different parts of the service to be chosen. They also noted that the improvement plan included these options and actions to implement them.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service
CASE STUDY 19  Partnership with another authority's Direct Works Organisation

Newport County Borough Council has been trialling a partnership with Monmouth Direct Works Organisation. The trial has been running since June 2000 and Newport is currently evaluating added value and value for money. Early indications show a definite improvement in the quality of work and response times, but cost evaluations have not yet been completed. If these evaluations prove satisfactory, the council will consider making this arrangement permanent. The alternative option is to bring the workforce back in-house, as part of an integrated team, thus eliminating the client-contractor role.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

114. The DTLR has produced a useful guide to partnerships between authorities and businesses (Ref. 12). The guide explores cultural differences between partners, how to approach a partnership, and structures and processes that help to make the partnership a success.

115. Across the authorities inspected, there are few examples of this type of partnership. However, PFI partnerships are beginning to be negotiated, for example, for street lighting and highway signs in Sunderland (CASE STUDY 20). It is still too early to determine how well this type of partnership works in improving the street scene.

OUTSOURCING

116. Established alternative service providers are currently providing a wide range of street scene services. Authorities need to re-examine a number of areas including:

- contractor relations;
- integrated contracts;
- outcome-based contracts; and
- client-contractor splits.

Contractor relations

117. Relationships between authorities and contractors generally appear to be constructive, with contact occurring at different levels within organisations. For example in the London Borough of Brent, the findings from the best value review were presented to members jointly by contractor staff and authority officers. Similarly, the London Borough of Camden has established solid working relationships with a contractor (CASE STUDY 21).

CASE STUDY 20  Private finance initiative

The City of Sunderland has embarked on a PFI scheme relating to street lighting and highway signs. A preferred supplier will be selected by June 2002, and service will commence in September 2002. The contract will cover replacement of some 28,000 lighting columns (representing around 65 per cent of the total stock) and around one half of the 20,000 illuminated and non-illuminated highway signs. The duration of the contract will be 25 years and estimated value over the whole term is £71 million.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview
CASE STUDY 21  Working with contractors

In the London Borough of Camden, Serviceteam, the current contractor for refuse collection and street cleaning, was engaged in 1996. Inspectors noted that council-contractor relations had improved and become more flexible. Both council officers and contractors reported effective working relationships. The contractor participated in the best value review. The council and contractors have jointly developed an NVQ training programme and Street Environment Services within the council has now become a recognised training centre.

The senior officer who was interviewed felt that the key factors that made this relationship work were:

• agreement of common objectives right from the start in an open and honest way;
• daily contact, common working and joint training of staff on the ground from both organisations;
• regular contact between the two organisations at all levels, for example, monthly Directors’ meetings;
• encouraging recognition among council staff that the culture has changed and that an adversarial council-contractor relationship no longer exists; and
• recognition that the relationship took time to build.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

Integrated contracts

118. Many contractors are not managing functions in an integrated way. Joint working and adequate time is needed to identify which procurement option offers the most potential to achieve improvements. In terms of the way in which services are packaged, no single model fits all, and authorities must evaluate different levels of co-ordination/integration to suit their circumstances. However, inspectors have expressed concerns about authorities’ willingness to adopt constructive and proactive approaches to exploring alternative ways of packaging and delivering services with suppliers. Worries about CCT-type contracts that will expire before partnerships can be arranged put time pressure on the process. A key issue is finding transitional solutions that retain flexibility while long-term solutions are being developed.

119. Integrated contracts require additional thought from all parties. The multi-task nature of integrated service provision can be more difficult to manage and can require training and development to ensure that the necessary skills are maintained. Street scene knowledge also tends to be structured along narrow professional lines, and this can make integrated contracts more difficult. Larger contracts will require an increase in pre-tender negotiations to discuss joint expectations and alternative options (such as joint ventures) thoroughly prior to bidding.

120. Negotiating integrated contracts takes time and effort on both sides, and early attempts to make the relationship work do not always go to plan, as in Solihull (CASE STUDY 22, overleaf). Authorities must accept such failures, learn from them, and continue to pursue the relationship, where appropriate.
In Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, grounds maintenance and street cleansing services were fragmented, as they were operating under a number of different specifications and being delivered by different service providers. This led to different standards of service. Contracts did not include all the works required, leading to some work not being done, or to it costing more than it should as it was missing from the specification. IT systems did not give timely performance management information. Contracts let under CCT were coming to an end, and this provided the opportunity to consider alternative provision methods.

To this end, a Street Care Partnership was introduced to deliver a co-ordinated, single contract for litter picking, grass cutting and the street cleansing service. This would give cleaner streets at reduced costs by using combined ‘single pass’ operations. Although an early trial of the partnership failed due to some resistance from staff, the concept was pursued with renewed efforts in staff consultation to encourage ownership and commitment. The new contract will start in March 2002 and now also includes housing grounds maintenance. It is designed to be flexible in order that the new provider ‘will be more attuned to improvement, not slavish compliance with detailed specification’ and so that additional areas of maintenance can be incorporated as part of a second phase of review. It is quality output based and responsive to changing local demands and the potential impact if the housing stock is transferred.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

**Outcome based contracts**

121. Input based contracts are still widely used, but inspectors have noted user dissatisfaction with some of these. Users are often unhappy with problems being addressed only with a particular contracted frequency rather as and when they arise. This has led some authorities to move towards more flexible and outcome based contracts.

122. Changing arrangements to become more flexible and outcome based requires careful evaluation by both client and contractor. Roles, particularly those of clients, may need to change depending on the options selected. Increased flexibility of contracts may lead to increased risk for both parties, and this risk will need to be managed. Additionally, outcome based contracts may provide an unfair tendering advantage to the incumbent, who would be familiar with ‘hotspots’ requiring attention.

**Client-contractor relationship**

123. A number of authorities have chosen to integrate the once-separate client and contractor arrangements that were put into place in response to CCT. At one authority this merger was justified on the basis of ‘improving managerial effectiveness and accountability and allowing reinvestment of managerial resources to under-managed areas’. However, at the time of inspection it had not yet been able to quantify the extent of improvements arising from the merger. This is not uncommon. It is vital that authorities demonstrate clear benefits to the end users of services before reverting to pre-CCT arrangements.
Poor performing services

124. Outsourcing in part or whole is unlikely to solve the problems of a struggling service. Contractors will be understandably reluctant to deal with authorities showing weak management, unclear aims and unrealistic expectations about rapid improvements. Poor performing services must focus on building client capacity before considering outsourcing the service(s).

125. Authorities must challenge current methods of service delivery, through market consultation and analysis, and rigorous option appraisals. In order to do this, authorities will need sound procurement strategies and relevant skills and expertise. Authorities need to take action in a number of areas (CHECKLIST 4).

CHECKLIST 4  Embracing competition

AUTHORITIES SHOULD:

- Make more use of existing guidance on competition, such as the Byatt report and DTLR guidance on partnerships (Refs 10 & 12).
- Address procurement issues at the time of review.
- Undertake a rigorous analysis of alternative service delivery options, including existing arrangements, and the implications of each option.
- Take time to consult potential suppliers, especially where more flexible or integrated contracts are required.
- Adopt a focus on general street scene outcomes rather than being too focused on inputs or individual service outcomes.
4. BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

126. Street scene is a complex service area that is hard to deliver well. Good performance and continued improvement call for:

- a clear focus on users and outcomes;
- the increased involvement of the community;
- increased co-ordination of services;
- strong leadership to manage change and drive improvement;
- sustained and robust performance management; and
- more rigorous application of competition.

127. Authorities that are facing severe difficulty, such as financial pressures or skills shortages, will need to take action on some areas sooner than others, getting the basics right before building up the service to relate better to users, the rest of the authority and external organisations. Given the diversity of street scene services, it is inappropriate to put forward a single standard checklist of good practice. However, case studies 23 and 24 illustrate how two authorities that are striving for excellence have made real improvements to the way that street scene services are provided.

128. The London Borough of Camden has demonstrated good practice in several areas in particular (CASE STUDY 23):

- learning from best practice elsewhere;
- introducing an ambitious programme of work, but limiting it to a few geographical areas initially;
- looking at the street scene in a joined up way;
- working effectively with a range of partners; and
- demonstrating tangible service improvement.
Residents told the Council that they wanted cleaner streets, better pavements and a more attractive environment. In response, the Camden Community Strategy included this target:

‘By 2005, the Council will make streets in Camden more attractive through better cleaning, design, enforcement and lighting. It will upgrade roads and pavements and keep them in a good state of repair’.

The Boulevard project is a concept that draws on the lessons learnt from continental cleaning regimes, and aims to match the best standards achieved on the continent. The project aims to make the street scene more attractive through a major capital investment programme and by doing things in new ways.

**ACTION**

The Council is carrying out a major programme to improve the local street environment. The programme includes a range of measures, such as:

- New footway surfaces
- Removing unnecessary street furniture
- Improved street lighting
- Reviewing enforcement activities
- Improved shop frontages
- Tackling graffiti and fly posting on street furniture
- More trees
- Better facilities for people with disabilities
- Better drainage

The detailed scope of the work and the cleaning regime in each street will depend on local circumstances. Eventually the whole borough will be covered, but work has already started in three areas.

**WHAT’S SO NEW ABOUT BOULEVARD?**

The initiative is different on a number of levels. Firstly, the Council is looking at all aspects of the street environment as a whole, in a joined up way. For example, there will be more washing of footways, rather than just sweeping them. Therefore, various ways to improve footway surfaces are being tested so that they can withstand high-pressure washing.

Environmentally friendly ways of obtaining the water for washing are being explored, such as by boring holes into Camden’s water table. This requires links between audit, design and construction of footway surfaces to the cleaning that will be carried out on them.

**THE PARTNERING APPROACH**

The Boulevard project involves working closely with a number of different partners:

- The most important partners are the residents of the Borough. The Council has given a commitment to inform residents before any work is carried out, and to ask for residents views when work is done.
- The public utility companies currently dig 20,000 holes a year in Camden’s streets. The Council has stated that it is essential that they work with them as partners to ensure that their works are carried out to the same high standards.
- Within Camden, the Street Environment team (inter alia) is working closely with other Council departments, such as Housing and Leisure.
- The Council will work closely with local shops and businesses to improve the appearance of their frontages and surrounding areas.

*continued overleaf*
OUTCOMES

Audits carried out by the Tidy Britain Group (now ENCAMS) in February 2001 identified significant leaps in the cleanliness of those areas where the Boulevard cleaning regime had been introduced.

For example, in Kings Cross they identified a 15 per cent improvement in cleanliness, with all streets achieving an acceptable level of cleanliness. In Camden Town their survey found a 27 per cent improvement in the cleanliness of streets, compared to previous surveys, with 95 per cent of roads achieving an acceptable level. They commented that ‘it is evident that current cleansing strategies and measures to control adverse environmental quality indicators are improving the environment in Camden High Street and surrounding roads’.

The effect of the new approach on trip claims has also been a significant achievement. Claims against the council fell from 152 at a cost of £395,000 in the preceding 3 years, to zero on ‘Boulevard roads’.

Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council has also demonstrated good practice in a number of areas in particular (CASE STUDY 24):

• introducing a strategy with actions and challenging targets;
• increased user and outcome focus;
• improved co-ordination of services;
• joint working with other departments;
• involving the community in improving services; and
• measuring and monitoring improvement.
Over the last year significant changes have taken place in the way in which Oldham Council manages litter and waste. One of the key objectives within the Council’s first corporate plan (2001/02) was to improve the image of the Borough by raising standards of cleanliness. This received widespread political support and resulted in the approval of the Cleanliness Strategy. Initiatives within the strategy have been developed into a series of actions embodied within Oldham’s Community Litter Plan. The activities within the Plan are centred on the following themes, with a series of challenging targets for each, up to 2005.

ENFORCEMENT
The establishment of an Environmental Action Unit (EAU) has resulted in an increased focus on enforcement for litter and fly tipping offences. Over 2,000 instances were investigated in 2000/01, with 96 per cent being responded to by the Unit within three working days. Over 125 litter and fly tipping notices were served, with 11 cautions and 21 prosecutions for fly tipping. In partnership with the police the EAU now tackles littering offences directly, by issuing £25 fixed penalty notices to people who drop litter. A similar approach has been taken with irresponsible dog owners.

JOINT WORKING AND TRAINING
Staff from Operational and Leisure Services, rather than from EAU, have begun to issue street litter control notices. Although the expertise for enforcement action rests mainly with the EAU, there is an acceptance that this department is better placed to make use of this particular piece of legislation. This joint approach is continued with a training programme run by the EAU for operational staff designed to enable people on the frontline, such as refuse collection, grounds maintenance or street cleansing staff, to recognise litter and fly tipping offences and know what information is required to enable a successful action to take place.

OPERATIONAL CHANGES
Many changes have taken place in the way that the refuse collection and street cleansing services operate. This is resulting in high performance services being provided on every level.

• **Integration of street cleansing and grounds maintenance** – Restructuring of the services has led to street cleansing being directly managed as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Service. This means that the cleaning of highways and adjoining areas has been combined and, as far as the public is concerned, the service is seamless.

• **Customer focus** – Operational and Leisure Services launched a departmental customer services centre in December 2000, offering, for the first time, a single point of contact for all waste-related issues. This includes handling some litter and fly tipping related calls for the EAU.

• **Output/outcome focused** – Street cleansing is no longer constrained by rigid schedules and frequencies. The aim is to ensure that areas are cleaned if, and when, they need cleaning and the service has been branded ‘Litterbusters’. The whole of street cleansing is centred on the ‘Litterbusters’ approach with a range of challenging response targets set out within the Community Litter Plan.

WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY
Oldham has developed a number of new and exciting ways to involve community groups.

• **Litter watch** – A network of ‘litter watchers’ is being developed across the Borough. These individuals are members of the public who act as environmental champions, reporting problems and working with the Council to achieve improvements. Over 50 were recruited within nine months and networking is beginning to take place between the litter watchers.

continued overleaf
• **Community solutions** – Oldham has begun to integrate actions within specific communities. This started in 2001 with a community centred round a prominent school. Local businesses, residents and the school met on two occasions and looked at possible solutions to some of the problems in the area. This resulted in a number of enforcement actions being planned for the area, and awareness raising designed with the school to take place in the spring of 2002. This approach is leading to the development of a model to allow application to other areas of the Borough.

• **Deprived area solutions** – A specific plan has been drawn up to begin to tackle waste and litter-related problems within one of the most deprived areas of the Borough, and one that has a high percentage of people from ethnic minorities. A street cleaner will be recruited from, and work within, the local community. A ‘People and Places Officer’ working within the area has already made significant connections within the community, encouraging community action, such as clean-ups around the local mosques.

• **Kerbside clean-up scheme** – A number of kerbside collections have been introduced as pilot schemes within parts of the Borough. The objective has been to provide an opportunity for people to get rid of unwanted furniture and other items by working in partnership with organisations who can make use of the material. Of the pilot collections so far organised there have been huge amounts diverted from the waste stream (between 20 per cent and 40 per cent).

• **Education and campaigning** – The focus over the last year has been working with The Tidy Britain Group’s (now ENCAMS) Eco-schools programme, for which 22 schools registered in the last year. Other initiatives have also been developed, including Oldham’s ‘Skips for Schools’ service, which is carried out in partnership with Rochdale and Oldham Groundwork, and is designed to encourage recycling by generating funds for schools. To raise awareness further among all sectors of the community, Oldham has invested in a litter campaign designed to operate over the long term. The campaign was launched in 2001 and has been branded with an eye catching ‘litter critter’. Since the launch the ‘litter critter’ has appeared at various events and is supported by a range of publicity material.

**CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Over the last year the Council has moved to the ENCAMS cleanliness index methodology to monitor how clean the Borough is. Following training, a programme of twice yearly monitoring is now taking place, with cleanliness targets set at an Area Committee level and for the Borough as a whole. Regular review of the Community Litter Plan will support the objective measurement of the standard of cleanliness on the ground. A number of other initiatives are taking place that highlight the improvements made in the last year to the way in which Oldham manages waste and its impact on the street scene.

*Source: Audit Commission Inspection Service and officer interview*

130. There is no instant solution to enable authorities to deliver a three-star service, and many have several areas to work on. The good practice identified in this paper does not provide universal solutions, as each authority must analyse its own problems and local circumstances. Wide-ranging best value reviews will help authorities to identify ways to improve, as will learning from the experience of their peers and the increasing flow of inspection judgements.
APPENDIX 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ADVISORY GROUP

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- **Dave Auger**, London Borough of Lambeth
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- **Simon Chapman**, Environmental Campaigns (formerly the Tidy Britain Group)
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- **Ian Hornby**, Lancashire County Council
- **Wayne Laramee**, Environmental Services Association
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OTHER AUTHORITIES

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- London Borough of Brent
- London Borough of Camden
- London Borough of Richmond
- Maldon District Council
- Newport County Borough Council
- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Sefton Borough Council
- Scarborough Borough Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- City of Sunderland

The Audit Commission also drew on evidence from a wide range of authorities across England and Wales that have been inspected.

STUDY TEAM

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APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS AFFECTING THE STREET SCENE

CROSS CUTTING REVIEW ON IMPROVING THE PUBLIC SPACE

On 25 June 2001, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Andrew Smith, announced seven initial cross-cutting reviews which will contribute to Spending Review 2002, one of which is on ‘Improving the Public Space’. This review looks at how Government policies, funding and targets can produce improvements in the safety and attractiveness of the public space – the local environment where people live their lives.

The lead minister for the review is Lord Falconer, Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration. The review process involves all relevant government departments and draws on the views of practitioners and others who can provide evidence to support its work. More information can be obtained by e-mailing public.space@dtlr.gov.uk

UDAL: DESIGNING STREETS FOR PEOPLE INQUIRY

Between autumn 2000 and autumn 2001, the Urban Design Alliance organised a consultation on the draft document ‘Designing Streets for People’. The final report is due to be published shortly.

The main recommendations are:

• Give people ownership – create responsibility, empowerment and accountability through single points of contact, Placecheck assessments, street partnerships and street agreements.

• Change the management of the street – introduce a Street Excellence Model, create public realm strategies, introduce street management and design codes and guidance, simplify and broaden the knowledge base, and promote innovation and flexibility.

• Reform the legislation – review the rights to use and enjoy public rights of way, and make people the basis of street legislation.

• Funding – ensure adequate resources to maintain and improve streets.

• Provide skills and expertise – for example, through a postgraduate MBA in urban street management, or modern apprenticeships in streetcraft skills.

AUDIT COMMISSION: ‘CHANGING GEAR’ – BEST VALUE ANNUAL STATEMENT 2001

Four key factors critical to the success of best value within authorities are identified:

• ownership and willingness to change;

• sustained focus on what matters;

• the capacity and systems to deliver improvement; and

• integration of best value into ‘the day job’.

The report includes a useful checklist for challenging best value reviews, based on the above factors, as the ‘building blocks’ for best value. Top performing authorities would be expected to have all of these building blocks in place.
DEFRA: LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY SURVEY

A DEFRA grant funds the environmental charity Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS) formerly known as the Tidy Britain Group and Going for Green. ENCAMS, in collaboration with the Office of National Statistics, LGA, the IDeA and the DTLR Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, is developing a unique measuring tool, the Local Environmental Quality Survey. The LEQS provides information about aspects of the local environment that are important to local people. Most importantly, LEQS information permits local authorities and others to target resources effectively and to determine whether current indicators/targets are meaningful. The pilot LEQS trials are well advanced and it is anticipated that this tool will be available for general use by April 2002.

DEFRA is also developing best local environmental codes of practice under its Pathfinder Programme, which is being managed on the Department’s behalf by ENCAMS. This Programme involves over 30 local authorities who are drawing up best guidelines, including an everyday version of the LEQS, which will enable local environmental managers to improve their effectiveness and allow local authorities to accurately monitor local environmental quality service performance. It will be used to produce local benchmarks for comparison with regional and national benchmarks. The Pathfinder best practice guidelines will be available in early 2003.

LIVING STREETS: WALKING AUDITS

Living Streets is an initiative run by the Pedestrians Association, and works to create streets and public spaces that people on foot can use and enjoy.

‘Walking audits’ form one part of this initiative. Authorities can select key pedestrian routes in a town, or major traffic and pedestrian exchanges, and bring Living Streets consultants in to conduct a walking audit. The objective would be to assess access for people with disabilities, opportunities for enhancing community safety, and general improvements to the state of the streets, in line with both best value and best practice. Walking audits can help to demonstrate an authority’s commitment to improving streets, and can build bridges between the authority and community groups.

As well as conducting the audit, Living Streets can also:

- train and consult local authority staff to carry out the audits;
- engage the community in the audit process, and prepare community representatives for the audit;
- present the findings of the audit to the authority and the community; and
- generate media interest and undertake PR work.
## APPENDIX 3: LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Reproduced from UDAL Designing Streets for People (Ref. 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Litter and Refuse</th>
<th>Litter Abatement Notices</th>
<th>Statutory Nuisances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Protection Act 1990</td>
<td>Issued by Magistrates under EPA 1990 1982</td>
<td>Abatement notices can be issued by the Local Authority which it is an offence to ignore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fly posting</th>
<th>Eyesores and Untidy Land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992</td>
<td>Untidy land Orders under S215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicle Obstruction</th>
<th>Controlling Access by Vehicles</th>
<th>Parking on a grass verge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S37 Highways Act 1980</td>
<td>Traffic Regulation Orders S1 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984</td>
<td>Not an offence unless an obstruction, or prohibited by specific local act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parking on the footway</th>
<th>Driving along the footway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not an offence unless an obstruction or prohibited by specific local act</td>
<td>S72 Highways Act 1835. Only enforceable by Police</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertising within the highway</th>
<th>Road openings by Statutory Undertakers</th>
<th>Rights exist under a variety of legislation especially New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permits issued under S115 Highways Act 1980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vending Stalls</th>
<th>Shop Advertising Boards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S115E Highways Act 1980</td>
<td>Not covered by Legislation unless obstructing highway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Licensed Obstructions</th>
<th>Charity Collections</th>
<th>Street Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highways Maintenance</th>
<th>Winter Maintenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Licensable Street Events</th>
<th>Street Trading</th>
<th>‘Consent Streets’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only applies to private land where access is restricted</td>
<td>Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982</td>
<td>Can be declared under the Act to allow more flexible control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street Cafes</th>
<th>Street Trading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highways Amenities Licence under S115E Highways Act 1980</td>
<td>Licence under S20 Licensing Act 1964 issued by Magistrates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise on the Street</th>
<th>Air Pollution</th>
<th>Air Pollution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alarms: S80EPA 1980</td>
<td>(from traffic)</td>
<td>(from sites or premises)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources: Control of Pollution Act 1974</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clean Air Act 1993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES

1. The Prime Minister, Improving your Local Environment (Liveability), speech by the Prime Minister, 24 April 2001.


USEFUL WEBSITES

Audit Commission Inspection Service
http://www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk

Countryside Agency
http://www.countryside.gov.uk/market-towns/commpart_01.htm

Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions
http://www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk/bestvalue
http://www.street-works.dtlr.gov.uk

Employers’ Organisation for Local Government
http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk

Improvement and Development Agency
http://www.idea.gov.uk

Library of Local Performance Indicators
http://www.local-pi-library.gov.uk

Living Streets (formerly the Pedestrians Association)
http://www.livingstreets.org.uk

National Assembly for Wales
http://www.wales.gov.uk

National Joint Utilities Group
http://www.njug.org.uk

TimeBank
http://www.timebank.org.uk

Urban Design Alliance
http://www.udal.org.uk

Welsh Local Government Association
http://www.wlga.gov.uk
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