
OUR ENVIRONMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the conclusions of the Best Value Review of Our Environment and proposes an Action Plan for service improvement.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Review considered:
- how well the Council contributes to the management of the physical environment;
 - the Council's contribution to keeping the locality clean;
- 2.2 The environment of the District influences the quality of life of all residents and the Council has a significant role to play in delivering that agenda, particularly through Partnership working.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The Review took as its focus two main themes:
- physical environment;
 - cleanliness of the area;
- 3.2 At the outset, it was considered essential to avoid overlap with other Best Value Reviews that had or were looking at the day-to-day operational aspects of these themes. The arrangements for the review were discussed and agreed by the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 17 June 2003 (Minute 277/03).
- 3.3 Therefore, in examining the themes, the Review sought to take a more strategic overview and to examine broader customer perceptions of the District's environment.
- 3.4 The Review sought to examine the Council's understanding of the contribution it makes to the District's environment and the role of Partnership working to deliver added value. The review fed into the CPA and helped to provide much of the information required for that process.
- 3.5 The brief summary of the findings of the review discussed below is supported by a focused action plan, attached as Appendix One to this report.

4 FINDINGS

- 4.1 The Council's responses and actions to achieve a high quality environment are crucial to the appearance and character of the District. Environment is not just about green countryside and attractive views. Every time we leave our home we interact with the environment in streets, town centres, parks and so on.
- 4.2 Perceptions of quality inevitably differ, but the appearance of new buildings, the maintenance of town centres, the protection of green spaces, air and noise pollution and disabled access, are all issues that influence our views about the District. The performance of the waste collection service and responses to the national agenda on recycling are key issues for residents. Many of these issues are already key components of the District's many strategy and policy documents. For example, the Local Plan focuses closely on design quality in the built environment. Therefore, there is no need for this review to examine areas where policy frameworks and interventions have already been developed.
- 4.3 It is important for the Local Authority to do everything it can, working in Partnership, to secure a high quality environment for the District's residents. The Review concluded that the Council does have a good understanding of the issues that contribute to an attractive and well-maintained environment, but there are areas where improvement is possible and where significant decisions must be taken in the future. Further, where policies are in place, it is important they be rigorously applied.
- 4.4 Cleanliness is one of the top priorities for the District to address. Whilst in overall terms the appearance of the District is positive, there are nevertheless issues relating to chewing gum, abandoned cars, graffiti, fly tipping and weed removal in town centres that need to be addressed. Whilst actions are suggested to deal with these issues, one of the difficulties is assessing the scale of the problems and developing indicators to demonstrate improvement. Therefore, it is proposed that a new 'state of the district' audit be carried out by independent assessors every three years to provide a real benchmark of progress.
- 4.5 In addition, there is no doubt that dealing with waste, and particularly developing a more expansive programme of recycling, including the development of better markets for recycled materials, presents real challenges for the future.
- 4.6 Refuse collection is a front line service that has an impact on all residents. The national agenda is firmly focused on an ever increasing component of recycled domestic waste. The Council is part of the Essex Consortium of Waste Authorities and work is progressing towards the development of a new contract for waste collection and disposal that will ensure Rochford and other Essex Authorities will need to consider if national targets are to be met. The

review concluded that partnership working on this issue was of paramount importance given the likely finances and capacity issues and the action plan proposes to reinforce the Council's participation in the development of the new contract arrangements.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Strategic Risk

The review has sought to consider significant strategic issues for the District, including waste and recycling, litter, crime and disorder, etc. These are all issues of great importance and do pose a significant strategic risk.

5.2 Resource Risk

The draft action plan seeks to identify possible resource issue in broad terms. The resource issues relating to waste and recycling and Crime and Disorder, for example, are recognised as being significant.

5.3 Operational Risk

The review deals with operational issues and improvement of service delivery has associated risk.

5.4 Reputation Risk

There is no doubt that many of the issues considered by the review team and developed as possible actions in the draft action plan do impact on reputation risk.

5.5 Third Party Risk

Some of the issues considered in the review are dependent on partnership working.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The review considered a broad range of matters that have implications for the environment of the District; various actions are proposed for improvement.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The overall resource implications of the draft action plan may very well be significant. However, it is worth taking into account that a range of actions for improvement is possible without additional resources being made available. Where Members agree to support items within the action plan they will be included within the draft budget strategy for consideration, along with other priorities.

8 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That Members consider the proposals outlined in the draft 'Our Environment' Best Value review Action Plan and determine a way forward. (HPS)

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Background Papers: Papers assembled during the best value review.

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