ENVIRONMENT – GENERIC DESCRIPTORS   **MAY 2005**

JUDGEMENT 1: HOW GOOD IS THE SERVICE?

Question 1: What has the service aimed to achieve?

KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY (KLOE)	This question is for context only. It will not result in a judgement; it will inform all other judgements
1. **What has the service aimed to achieve in terms of:** 1.1 community and user needs? 1.2 regional and national priorities? 1.3 wider corporate ambitions, strategies and priorities for improvement?	**Generic** Describe the responsibilities of the council in relation to the service – taking account of any differences for county, district, metropolitan, unitary councils etc**.** Describe the objectives for the service, as expressed in strategic plans, and describe any links with: the community strategy and other corporate plans and strategies; and its understanding of the wider contextual challenges and opportunities facing it, in the short and longer term (for example climate change), and reference made to targets and improvements in cross-cutting areas, including community safety, diversity and equal opportunities. Describe, as appropriate, the services' and community's geographic, demographic, economic, environmental and social operating context: what it is now and how it may change in the future. Describe the council's understanding of the global, national, regional and local context.

Question 2: Is the service meeting the needs of the community and/or users?

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Access, customer care and user and / or community focus. 2.1 Are the needs of citizens and users at the heart of the design and delivery of the service now and in the future? 2.2 Is the service accessible, responsive and based on a robust understanding of local need? 2.3 Are service standards clear and comprehensive and have users been involved in setting them where appropriate? 2.4 Are there appropriate arrangements for consulting, engaging and communicating with users and non-users?	**Generic** • Has staff that demonstrate user focus in their work and who treat people with dignity, respect and fair treatment at all times. • Has front-line staff that demonstrate a wide range of knowledge about the full range of enquiries they receive or know who or how to access the necessary information to help service users. • Has services that are easily accessed through conveniently located offices (where appropriate), by telephone, post, in person, internet, including out of office hours etc - all of which are dealt with efficiently and effectively and are known to be the way service users want to access the service. There is sensitive and appropriate use of language, translation and staffing etc. Has signs leading to offices and receptions that are clear and effective. Successfully publicises all methods of access along with opening times and arrangements for out-of-hours contact which are clear, and have been agreed following consultation with users. • Has customer service point(s) which are fully wheelchair accessible, with hearing loops, and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. • Has set challenging service standards in conjunction with service users and stakeholders, which are tailored to meet local need. Customers are aware of the standards, understand them and are informed on how well the organisation is meeting those standards.	**Generic** • Staff generally have a reasonable approach to customer care, but there are some examples of some staff providing an inconsistent approach to customer care. Individuals may have high standards, but it is not strongly enough part of the organisation's culture and customer care is therefore sometimes patchy. • Has front-line staff who demonstrate reasonable knowledge about many services, but have some gaps in the range of knowledge about the enquiries they are likely to receive and are unclear where or who to access the information from, to be able to help service users. • Offers a reasonable range of ways for service users to contact the service, but some are not as efficient and effective as others, therefore providing inconsistent service provision. Has many customers who do not find getting to the office convenient OR has some offices that are not easy to locate OR has opening times and arrangements for out-of-hours contact that are either not clear and well publicised or have not been agreed following consultation with users. • Has some customer service points that are not fully wheelchair accessible with hearing loops and in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. • Has set some key service standards, and having set them, has either not published them widely and/ or is not monitoring them.

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	• Actively canvasses the views of service users and uses them to review or improve services. Service users are consulted and involved in major decisions that affect the service. Service users feel confident that their input will be valued and acted upon. The service can demonstrate changes in service delivery resulting from user feedback. *For example, changing times of committee meetings, holding local planning surgeries, provision of a duty officer.* The service can demonstrate significant changes to policies that have resulted from stakeholder and community input. The council has agreed proposed policy changes with stakeholders. *For example changes to the development plan or supplementary planning guidance.*	• Seeks users' opinions, but does not always act on them and places a greater emphasis on seeking the views of stakeholders.
	• Employs a range of consultation techniques that allow it to adjust its approach depending on local circumstances. *For example, planning for real exercises, focus groups, specific presentations to local interest/minority groups, mounting exhibitions where people are – in supermarkets and schools – rather than asking people to come to you.*	• The council carries out statutory consultation processes.
	• Offers a range of services and information via the internet, for example, forms can either be downloaded or submitted on-line, and service requests can be submitted on-line.	• The website is of limited use to access services and service users cannot easily contact staff by e-mail or telephone.
	• Has information from surveys and databases that inform it of groups of customers who are not accessing the service as frequently as others. Action is taken to remove any barriers to accessing the service.	• Has very little information available on customers who are not accessing the service and very little action is being taken to remove barriers to accessing the service.
	• The service actively solicits and monitors service complaints. The service has changed service delivery in the light of learning from complaints.	• The council manages complaints and responds to them promptly, but does not routinely use them to drive service improvements.

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Diversity 2.5 Does the delivery of the service embrace equality, diversity and human rights and ensure that all users, or potential users, have fair and equal access?	**Generic** • The organisation has a clear understanding of its local community and uses census and other information, including the input of local stakeholders and partners, to understand the requirements of its service users and the wider community. It is making use of this information to meet the needs of those that require its services and to improve service delivery. • Information about the ethnicity, vulnerability and disability of service users is used to ensure services are strategically planned, prioritised and delivered in a non discriminatory way. • Has consistently utilised effective engagement mechanisms to understand the views, needs, desires and preferences of its users and non service users, including those from vulnerable, minority and otherwise marginalised or hard-to-reach groups. This information has been used to improve the service. • Works with its component communities to ensure fairness, equity and representation in service take up. Those from marginalised groups are confident that their voice(s) are and will be heard. • Provides information about services and service standards in a comprehensive range of languages and formats appropriate to service users' needs e.g. large print, Braille, other languages etc. and supplements this through tailored support to users. • Staff mix of the service is reflective of the community being served and consistent at all levels. • Does not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person or other organisation on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, class,	**Generic** • Has an awareness of its service user base and has made efforts to strategically plan and offer services to most service users. Has resources identified, but may not have allocated them yet to meet the needs of all service users. • Will not systematically record information about ethnicity, vulnerability or disability, and use it to inform strategic planning and service delivery and to prioritise resources, though there is evidence of a diverse range of service needs being met. • Has engagement mechanisms such that there is an inconsistency in the understanding of the views, needs, desires and preferences of its users and non service users, including those from vulnerable, minority and otherwise marginalised or hard-to-reach groups. • There are inconsistencies in how the service works with its component communities to ensure fairness, equity and representation in service take up. Those from marginalised groups may not be confident in their voice(s) are or will be heard. • Provides some information which is readily available in appropriate formats and other languages, but this is not comprehensive. • The staff mix is reflective of the community overall but not at all levels. • Does not discriminate directly or intentionally against any person or other organisation on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, class, appearance,

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	appearance, religion, beliefs, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice. The service complies with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.	religion, beliefs, responsibility for dependants, unrelated criminal activities, or any other matter which causes a person to be treated with injustice. The service complies with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
	• The service can demonstrate that it has an integrated approach to equality, diversity and human rights, which is reflected in its decision-making, policies and practices for both service delivery and employment. The human rights and equalities implications of proposed decisions or actions are spelt out and considered fully before action is taken. Staff are aware of their obligations and that the rights of individuals are carefully balanced against those of the wider community before making decisions. The service has a pro active approach for raising awareness with service managers and front-line staff – this goes beyond responding to legal challenges and complaints when they happen.	• Diversity, equality and human rights implications of proposed service decisions or actions are considered before action is taken. Service policies and practices have been reviewed for the equalities and human rights legislation. Some changes have been made as a result and good progress is being made in addressing remaining weaknesses.
	• The service has risked assessed its policies for human rights and equalities and keeps abreast of current case law and makes changes where appropriate.	• The service follows human rights and equalities case law makes changes to its services where appropriate.
	• Procurement policies are well drawn up and inclusive. Contractors and consultant demonstrate their commitment to diversity in service provision. Their performance is monitored and informs service improvement.	• Procurement is compliant with legislation but not consistently to meet the criteria 'above minimum standards'. Contractors and consultants cannot demonstrate commitment to diversity in service provision. Their performance is infrequently monitored and/or fails to inform service improvement.
Service outcomes for users and the community 2.6 Is the organisation delivering what it promised to?	**Generic** • There is strong working across administrative boundaries that delivers good outcomes for users and/or the community (e.g. county and districts, adjacent unitaries, local and regional). • The CPA analysis of relevant BVPIs shows performance well above minimum standards across most .relevant	**Generic** • Whilst there may be working across administrative boundaries it does not deliver better outcomes for users and/ or the community. • CPA analysis of relevant BVPIs shows neither strong performance nor that below minimum standards in priority performance information (PPI) and only very limited examples of performance

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2.7 Is the service effective in meeting local, regional and national objectives? 2.8 What is user experience of, and satisfaction with, the quality of the service?	indicators • The service has delivered outcomes which have integrated economic, environmental and social issues in a consistent way. • The council has been taking positive steps to reduce its own CO2 emissions and can evidence these reductions. It has been encouraging stakeholders and the wider community to do the same. • The council is thinking strategically about how to adapt its services to the effects of climate change and has implemented some projects which have addressed potential risks. • The council can show (for example by means of an accredited environmental management system) how its decision-making has led to reductions in resource use, either its own resource use, or that of others. • The council can show (for example by means of an accredited environmental management system) how its decision-making has reduced the environmental impact of its own services, or that of others. • The council proactively maintains its own buildings to conserve/preserve the fabric and encourages other landlords to do the same. • Maintenance is carried out in such a way so as to improve aspects of environmental quality e.g. increase bio-diversity, reduce harmful chemicals.	below minimum standard in other PIs. • The outcomes which the service has delivered have not intentionally been addressing economic, environmental and social issues in an integrated fashion. Where this has happened it has been in an ad-hoc, inconsistent way. • The council has taken some steps to reduce its own CO2 emissions but cannot clearly evidence any reductions. It has not been actively encouraging stakeholders and the wider community to do the same. • The council has started to consider the need to adapt its services to the effects of climate change but has not implemented any projects which specifically address potential risks. • Some piecemeal efforts are being made to minimise the use of resources but these are ad-hoc and not part of systematic delivery. • Some piecemeal efforts are being made to minimise the environmental impact of its own operations but these are ad-hoc and not part of systematic delivery. • The council does not proactively maintain its own buildings as a matter of course and tends to deal with maintenance issues when problems arise. It is not proactively encouraging other landlords to operate preventative maintenance regimes. • Maintenance work does not systematically ensure that environmental issues are addressed and improved.

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	- The service is making a significant contribution towards creating/developing a sustainable, quality environment. - The service is making a significant contribution towards maintaining/managing a sustainable, quality environment. - Customer service standards and user satisfaction are monitored and targets met/exceeded. Standards apply to all forms of communication. Post scheme satisfaction assessments are carried out. The service has monitoring methods, e.g. employs 'mystery shoppers' to monitor/improve services.	- The service is making piecemeal efforts towards creating/developing a sustainable, quality environment. - The service is making piecemeal efforts towards maintaining/managing a sustainable, quality environment. - There is inconsistency / incompleteness of customer service standards meaning there are gaps in understanding of performance or where focus for improving services should be.

Question 3: Is the service delivering value for money?

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3.1 How do the organisation's costs compare to others, allowing for local context, performance and policy choices?
 	
3.1.1 How do the service costs compare with others?
 	
3.1.2 What external local factors affect costs and how do adjusted costs compare?
 	
3.1.3 Are costs commensurate with service delivery, performance and the outcomes achieved?
 	
3.1.4 Do costs and resource allocation reflect policy decisions?
 	
3.1.5 Is accurate information on costs and services collected and is this used to decide priorities and strategically manage resources?
	• Current level of service costs as shown by:
	  o actual spending in relation to other councils
	  o cost profiles and cost PIs
	  o audit reports
	  o recent external inspections
	• Relationship between costs and the level of services provided, taking account of:
	  o external local contextual factors that can be shown to influence costs for the service (deprivation, geography, demography, etc)
	  o quality and standards achieved, including targeted investment to improve poorer services
	  o demand and supply levels
	  o range of discretionary services provided
	  o level of overheads and how accounted for
	  o performance of the service capital programme
	• The extent to which resources and policy are aligned, and how costs are assessed when policy decisions are made.
	• Accurate information on costs and services is routinely collected and is used to decide and strategically manage resources
		• There is clear and accurate information on overall service and unit costs, how these compare to others and to the quality of services. Reasons for differences are clearly understood and the service/organisation systematically uses this information to review cost effectiveness.
		• Overall costs compare favourably to other organisations providing similar levels and standards of services and allowing for the local context.
		• There is a positive relationship between costs (including overheads and capital costs) and the range, level and quality of services provided, – reflected in high quality services.
		• Unintended high spending is identified and addressed effectively.
		• Resources have been allocated in accordance with policy decisions and are used to target and deliver organisational priorities. Areas of higher spending are also in line with stated service priorities and the investment has resulted in improved services. Full cost implications are assessed as part of the decision making process.
		• Capital spending decisions are always taken with full information on the revenue implications and financial forecasts of their longer term impact.
		• The service has a well managed capital programme (if any) with projects completed on time and within budget.
		• Cost data is timely, accurate and consistently used to improve services
			• There is some information on service costs, how these compare to other providers and to the quality of services, but the reasons for differences are not fully understood or used consistently to review cost effectiveness.
			• Overall costs and unit costs for key service areas are not significantly higher than others providing similar levels and standards of services, allowing for the local context.
			• Where costs are low (including overheads and any capital costs) services provided are of an average range, level and quality.
			• Significant unintended high spending is identified and addressed.
			• There is a positive relationship between costs (including overheads and capital costs) and the range, level and quality of services provided.
			• Service capital projects (if any) are generally completed on time and in budget.
			• Policy decisions do not consistently reflect resource availability and/or allocation

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3.2 How is value for money managed, including through partnership and procurement and taking a long term view?
 	
3.2.1 Are modern procurement methods and partnerships applied that result in demonstrable value for money and delivering outcomes that meet the needs of users and/or the community?
 	
3.2.2 Do VFM considerations focus on the costs and benefits to the customer?
 	
3.2.3 Are management arrangements focused on value for money, and are they underpinned by robust mechanisms to drive and monitor progress and review impact?
	• Robustness of the procurement strategy
	• The extent to which the procurement framework and decision making follow good practice.
	• The impact that procurement practice, partnerships and past investment have made on costs, value and service quality.
	
	• The extent to which VFM considerations focus on benefits to users and/or the community
	• Monitoring and review of service costs includes:
	  o Consideration of value for money in preparing the annual service budget
	  o Internal reviews (including Best Value reviews)
	  o Reviewing comparative performance
	  o Cost indicators.
	• How VFM monitoring and review processes help deliver value for money and competitiveness
		• Procurement strategies fully embrace and practically apply partnering and other modern procurement frameworks.
		• The service/organisation uses effective procurement practice. Procurement decisions are taken on an objective basis within a transparent framework that follows good practice.
		• Demonstrable improvements in value for money have been achieved through procurement/partnership or internal reviews without unintended loss of service quality (or quality increased at no extra cost). Options for joint procurement and working with partners are identified and acted upon to improve value.
		• Service users recognise that services have been designed to best meet their needs and aspirations within the financial constraints.
		• The scope for improving cost-effectiveness is kept under review and scrutiny and innovative approaches are used where appropriate. There are clear policies and effective processes for reviewing and improving value for money. Internal reviews are targeted at high cost service areas and lead to improved value for money.
			• The council has effective procurement practices and has in place a strategy that reflects good practice.
			• Recent procurement examples delivering improving value for money through lower costs and/or improved service.
			
			• Consideration is given to the likely impact on service users of changes in spending levels.
			• Processes for reviewing and improving value for money are in place, including setting targets. Service managers use appropriate information to review value for money and report to the appropriate councillors/governance structure. Areas of high spending identified are subject to review and scrutiny and action to address the results.
			• Service reviews have led to some improvements in cost-effectiveness or efficiency.