Committee Report

Rochford District Council

To the Meeting of:	ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SUB-COMMITTEE	
On:	12 JANUARY 2000	
Report of:	HEAD OF CORPORATE POLICY AND INITIATIVES	
Title:	RDC - ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	
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Purpose of Report

This report updates members on the review of the environmental effects of functions carried out by Rochford District Council.

Background

As members will be aware, Rochford District Council has a wide impact on the environment through the policies it adopts and the way it delivers its services. In order to set a good example in its operations, an environmental management system can be adopted to ensure that environmental awareness pervades all policies and operations of Council.

Basically, an environmental management system is the framework for, or method of guiding an organisation to achieve and sustain good environmental performance. It will set out a systematic process for thinking about, undertaking and monitoring Councils activities in relation to environmental management.

Benefits

Environmental management systems are designed to bring a number of benefits to participating authorities (or businesses), as follows:

Legislation: Environmental legislation is both increasing and becoming increasingly stringent. In this country, legislation already covers emissions to air, liquid effluent, solid waste, dust emissions, noise, storage, and other similar areas. The development of an environmental management system will not only ensure compliance with all legislative requirements, but will also make it easier to identify and plan for impending legislation.

Environmental Performance: Improvements in environmental performance and a reduction in the environmental damage caused by Council.

Financial Savings: Good environmental management can pinpoint opportunities for cost savings. For example, energy efficiency and waste minimisation are two areas of environmental management which can improve profitability.

Service Delivery: Environmental quality is an important aspect of overall quality of service that is often overlooked. An environmental management system will ensure a systematic and consistent approach to environmental management across the whole authority.

Corporate Image: A good environmental record can improve corporate image and create better relations with customers and the community we serve. Bad publicity about environmental performance can be very damaging.

Demonstration of Commitment: Local authorities are increasingly asking for evidence of quality management systems from industry. In order to do this and maintain credibility, the local authority should lead by example.

Environmental Review

The environmental review is a scoping study which sets out to:

a) establish the current activities of Council with regard to the environment;
b) provide baseline data against which further improvements in environmental performance can be measured;
c) identify key areas of environmental significance;
d) highlight areas which will be a priority for improvement.

The purpose of the review is to provide information on the current situation of the Council with respect to environmental issues. In essence, the environmental review is a baseline survey against which subsequent audits can measure improvements, over time, against certain criteria.

The distinction between ‘direct effects’ and ‘service effects’ will be used a great deal during this process. The main direct effects are identifiable, as follows:

- energy consumption in buildings used by council staff and for plant and equipment
- water consumption in buildings and for activities of council staff
- transport use - fuel consumption, emissions, contribution to congestion etc.
- purchasing - consumption of resources and materials
- solid wastes produced from council activities and polluting emissions and discharges to air and water from council activities

Direct effects are also relatively easily measurable. For example, consumption of energy can be measured by kilowatt hours of electricity or therms of gas consumed and purchases can be measured by volume or cost. This makes them relatively easy to review and to set targets for. Direct effects are all essentially ‘negative’ in their impact on the environment, so it is generally easy to say what constitutes an improvement in performance.

Service effects are not so straightforward. Some are fairly immediate and obvious, like the air pollution regulation activities of an environmental health

department, an authorities recycling initiative or a nature conservation programme. But others are more indirect, for example, a planning department can have an impact on groundwater extraction by giving or refusing planning permission to developments (e.g. a golf course) which use a lot of water.

Significance

It is possible to identify a large number of potential environmental consequences of practically any local authority activity, but most of them will be relatively small and unimportant. It would clearly not be practicable to apply formal management procedures to more than a few of them, and it would also not be desirable. The point of the environmental management system is to promote continuous improvements in the environmental performance of local authority activities. To achieve this, effort and attention should be concentrated on the effects that really matter - the most significant environmental effects.

There is no simple rule or formula for deciding which effects are significant, and it can be judged in a number of ways, for example:

- The magnitude of the effect in relation to the issue concerned - some impacts of the authority may be very small in relation to the total environmental problem; others may make a major difference to it. For example, buying staples does not have an big impact on iron ore depletion, but traffic policies are a major influence on local air pollution.
- The magnitude of the effect in relation to other effects of the Council. In a committee services section, paper consumption is clearly a significant effect, whereas in a highways department, other effects may be regarded as more significant.
- The environmental issue concerned. It can be argued that some issues are more important than others, perhaps because of local conditions or because of public or political interest.

None of these criteria is ‘right’, but for us to judge what we consider to be ‘significant’. Refer to Appendix One criteria for determining environmental significance.

Rochford District Council

Refer to Appendix Two for the results of the review of Rochford District Council, These results are taken from a survey (Appendix Three) and information given during staff training on environmental matters.

Crime and Disorder Implications

None

Environmental Implications

As above

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None

Parish Implications

None at this stage

Proposed that this Sub-Committee RECOMMENDS

That the report be noted and that a further report be prepared in due course detailing the specific areas where environmental improvements can be implemented. (HCPI)

Background Papers

None

Criteria for Determining Environmental Significance

An impact is considered to be significant if it fulfils one or more of the following criteria:

a) A large impact in terms of size, quantity or toxicity on the environment or the quality of life of local people, or if local people perceive the impact to be large.

b) A large impact on the local visual amenity or something of particular local distinctiveness - in particular, do any Council activities impact on visual amenity from key vantage points, or in areas of special local distinctiveness and value?

c) A large impact on local wildlife and wildlife habitats including water habitats - do any council activities damage habitats, or affect the ecological balance of an area? In particular, it is important to think about designated wildlife sites and other areas of particular local value.

d) A large impact elsewhere in the Essex - do any Council activities have significant impacts elsewhere in the region or County but outside the boundary of the district?

e) A medium to large impact outside the boundaries of the Essex whether the impact be on a national, European or global scale - some impacts, especially air and water pollution may have effects which are well beyond the boundaries of the region. If this is the case, then the impact need not be large at any one point for the overall effect to be significant.

f) An impact that will continue for a significant time into the future - if the impact is likely continue over a long period of time, then even if the impact at any one time does not seem significant, the impact could be considered significant because of its impact on future generations.

g) A potential impact which could involve a breach of environmental legislation and regulations.

h) A potential impact which could be significant if an accident occurs or under abnormal or emergency circumstances and which therefore requires careful day to day management.

i) An impact which is growing much faster in comparison to other impacts.

j) Any activity which could conflict with the Councils adopted environmental policy, with the environmental aspects of other Council policies or with codes of practice to which the council subscribes.

k) Any cumulative effect which arises over time or in combination with other effects.

Worksheet: Scoping Review of Direct Effects

Operational Unit: _____

Worksheet filled in by: _____

Date: _____

This worksheet should be used to identify those activities of the operational unit which cause or influence 'direct effects' on the environment. The answers should then be used as the starting point for the worksheet for the detailed review of a direct effect.

Energy Use in Buildings, Plant and Equipment

1. Does the unit use - and control the use of - significant amounts of energy in its buildings, plant and electricity-using equipment?

   a) Please list the buildings.

   b) Please list the plant.

   c) Please list the equipment and what it is used for.

Water Consumption

2. Do any activities of the unit use significant amounts of water? Please list these activities.

Transport Use

3. Do any of the activities of the unit make use of transport vehicles or petrol or diesel - using plant and equipment to a significant degree? Please list these activities, and the type of transport, plant or equipment they use

Purchasing

4. Does the unit make any purchases whose type or quantity could result in significant environmental effects? Please list these purchases (in groups of related items), and the activities for which they are purchased.

Wastes and Pollution

5. Do any of the activities of the unit produce significant amounts of solid waste or significant quantities of emissions to air or discharges to water courses, drains or sewers? Please list these activities, and the type of wastes, emissions and discharges produced.

Other Direct Effects

6. Does the unit have any other direct effects on the environment, for example, through noise or new buildings? Please list these.

Worksheet: Scoping Review of Activities with Service Effects

Operational Unit: _____

Worksheet filled in by: _____

Date: _____

This worksheet should be used to identify those activities of the operational unit which have 'service effects' on the environment. The answers should then be used as the starting point for the worksheet for the detailed review of a service effect: a copy of that worksheet should be used for each significant effect identified here.

Activities

1. Please list the activities which make up the operational unit.

2. Does, or could, the activity significantly influence the way or the amount that other people (including households, individuals or businesses) affect the environment, or have more immediate effects, in any of the following ways:

Natural Resources

1) Use of energy (other than transport fuels which should be covered under transport below).
2) Use of water.
3) Use of materials or resources (consider both amounts and types used).

Pollution and Waste

4) Use of Transport
5) Production of air pollution (other than through transport which should be covered under 4)
6) Production of water pollution (including discharges to drains, sewers and water courses)

Environmental Amenities

7) Condition and quantity of land, natural habitats, open space, landscapes or other aspects of the natural environment.
8) Appearance and quality of streets, buildings, townscapes or other features of the built environment.
9) Production of noise

Other

10) Awareness, education or provision of information of the public or particular group of people about the environment.

11) Any other effects.

Activity	Significant Service Effect

Worksheet: Detailed Review of Direct Effects

Operational Unit: _____

Worksheet filled in by: _____

Date: _____

Which direct effect is this copy of the worksheet about? _____

_____

This worksheet should be used to identify the quantities and types of each significant direct effect caused or influenced by the operational unit (or authority as a whole).

One copy of he worksheet should be used for each of the significant direct effects identified in the worksheet for the scoping review of direct effects.

This links very closely to the programme for a direct effect, and it may be convenient to complete worksheets for this at the time.

Measurement: quantities

1. a) How much was used/bought/disposed of last year?

b) Has this volume been rising, falling or staying about the same over the last few years? Is there a reason for this?

Measurement: costs

2. a) What was the cost last year?

b) Has this volume been rising or falling over the last few years? Is there a reason for this?

c) Was there any cost or saving made last year from reduction measures?

d) Was there any extra cost or saving made through using ‘environmentally friendly’ options last year?

Reduction Measures

3. What measures, if any have been taken or are being taken to reduce volumes?

Environmentally friendlier options

4. a) Was any of last year's consumption/purchase/disposal 'environmentally friendly'? If so, in what way?

   b) What proportion was environmentally friendly?

   c) Has this proportion been rising or falling over the last few years?

Legislation, policies etc.

5. a) What legislation, regulations and/or council policies, if any govern these environmental effects?

b) Have there been any instances of non-compliance with these? Please give details.

Evaluation

6. Is any evaluation possible of these effects and measures taken?

Recommendations

7. Are there any recommendations arising from the answers above?

Worksheet: Detailed Review of Service Effects

Operational Unit: _____

Worksheet filled in by: _____

Date: _____

Which direct effect is this copy of the worksheet about? _____

_____

This worksheet should be used to identify how the operational unit's significant activities affect (or could potentially affect) the environment.

It may be convenient to consider the programme at the same time.

One copy of he worksheet should be used for each of the 'activities with significant environmental effects' identified in the scoping worksheet. Where activities were identified as having an impact on more than one aspect of the environment, all aspects should be covered in this worksheet.

Effects

1. How does this activity affect the environment, or how could it?

Measurement

2. a) Can these effects be measured in any way? If so, what indicator(s) can be used to measure them?

b) What effects were caused last year?

3. Has the activity been causing more or less damage to the environment over the last few years? Has any benefit to the environment been increasing or decreasing? Is there a reason for this?

Improvement Measures

4. What measures have been taken, if any, to reduce damaging environmental effects or to increase environmental benefits?

Legislation, policy, etc.

5. a) What legislation, regulations and/or council policies, if any govern these environmental effects?

b) Have there been any instances of non-compliance with these? Please give details.

Evaluation

6. Is any evaluation possible of these effects and measures taken?

Recommendations

7. Are there any recommendations arising from the answers above?