

# Item no.

Report to: **Audit Scrutiny Committee**  
Date: **13<sup>th</sup> February 2006**  
Report of: **Director of Community Services**  
Subject: **Review of Environmental Services and the District Concordat**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update Members regarding the position of the environmental Concordat, and to outline changes which are proposed to Council refuse, street cleansing and horticultural services.

## **2. Consultation**

- 2.1 No consultation regarding this report has been necessary. The Executive Member for Environment and Transportation has been closely involved in overseeing the proposed improvements to operations. Staff and Trade Unions are also closely involved in current changes to environmental operations, which is on-going.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 On 14<sup>th</sup> February 2000 the District of Easington Council, Sedgefield Borough Council and Durham City Council signed up to a formal declaration of commitment to work in partnership. This concordat stated that, *"In order to achieve best value the councils of Durham City, the District of Easington and Sedgefield Borough have agreed to work together to ensure that services delivered to their communities are to the highest standard and by the most economic, efficient and effective means available"*.
- 3.2 An opportunity to demonstrate this commitment presented itself in the form of a joint best value review of environmental services as by coincidence each partner had just or was about to commence a review of these services. During a formal scoping exercise involving elected members, and officers from each authority, representatives from the best value inspection service, district audit, IDeA and Easington's trade union representatives it was agreed that the scope of the review was to, create sustainable environmental improvements through greater education and enforcement and a joint approach to service delivery thus clearing the first of a three stage inspection regime.

# Item no.

- 3.3 The scope of the review covered refuse collection, street cleansing, fleet management, grounds maintenance and highways maintenance.
- 3.4 Considerable Member, Officer and Trade Unions time was invested in the review, through information exchange, baseline assessments, market research, examination of best practice, option appraisals, financial forecasting and delivery planning. Consultancy and survey services were also engaged to support and guide this process.
- 3.5 The work resulted in significantly improved knowledge and awareness of the respective strengths and weaknesses, of each Council's environmental services. From this process, there were a range of potential improvements that were identified and reflected in an improvement plan. This draft improvement plan outlined potential joint working arrangements and the incremental establishment of a public-public structure to achieve this. These proposals were subject to a detailed business plan being prepared, and would be in furtherance of the joint best value review objectives to improve environmental education, operations and enforcement. This exercise in joint improvement planning subsequently passed the second stage of the aforementioned three stage inspection process.
- 3.6 The plans for the joint venture were ambitious, and involved significant risk and change, for example, the establishment of a company vehicle to deliver the services. Over the course of the negotiations, circumstances changed to the extent that one of the parties did not feel able to proceed as had been earlier envisaged.
- 3.7 The work in developing the joint best value review should not be considered as wasted however. The baseline assessments undertaken have influenced the contents of Service plans for instance in recycling and fleet management from 2003/4 to the present day. In particular a four day week for refuse and zonal working arrangements, now operational in both Durham and Sedgefield have been given serious consideration. Much of the remainder of this report details its planned introduction in Easington.
- 3.8 Some of the inter-authority officer groups established at the time of the original review continue to meet. For example, the Enforcement and Education Group is currently examining ways to collaborate on training and awareness of staff in the implications of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act.

# Item no.

- 3.9 Members should also be aware of the potential impact of a Local Area agreement currently being negotiated and agreed across County Durham, involving all the local authorities as well as a range of key stakeholders. This report outlines the environmental targets it is likely to contain, which if it is to work, will involve an expansion of the principles and partners contained in the original Concordat.

## 4. Position Statement and Option Appraisal

### 4.1 Changes to Environmental Operations

- 4.1.1 Appendix 1 details the relative environmental performance of Easington, Sedgefield and Durham City Councils. Overall it reveals high satisfaction levels across all three authorities for refuse collection, but for Easington relatively low performance in street cleansing, which is reflected in relatively low satisfaction rates. Costs of refuse collection in the District are also relatively high.

- 4.2 On 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006 Executive met to consider these performance issues, and decided in principle to introduce four day week and zonal working arrangements. The potential benefits are as follows:

- 4.2.1 *Four day week for refuse collection.* This would involve emptying the District's bins on four days (Tuesday-Friday) rather than the current five. This would avoid the need for weekend work on vehicle repair, minimise disruption caused by bank holidays, and involve potential savings, estimated at £ 58,000. The spare Monday could be used as a "catch up day" if required, for example due to inclement weather.

As a key element of the collective agreement that has been negotiated, there will no longer be a continued reliance on street cleansing staff to provide relief cover to refuse. This will mean that a full complement of these teams can be deployed.

- 4.2.2 *Zonal working.* This would involve the integration of street cleansing and horticulture, and the establishment of four clean and green teams, each working within one of four designated zones in the District (Appendix 2). This would have the benefit of improved co-ordination between horticulture and cleansing, for example litter picks prior to grass cutting, and would also allow each team to be familiar with a particular area. The "clean" and "green" teams would also have a "mean" element, with strong links to enforcement.

# Item no.

Refuse collection would also operate according to these zones, with teamwork between refuse crews to ensure all of the bins within a particular zone are emptied in one day. This makes publicity regarding changed arrangements much simpler, and will improve efficiency in tackling missed bins.

4.3 Further reports to Executive during February 2006 will set out the composition of the clean and green teams, as well as other operational details. A steering group of Trades Union and workforce are meeting regularly to discuss details such as refuse rounds, and the staff restructure.

#### 4.4 Local Area Agreement

4.4.1 The Local Area Agreement currently being negotiated has a number environmental of performance indicators, including:

- BV199a Percentage of sites with unacceptable levels of litter and detritus
- Satisfaction with standards of street cleanliness
- BV82a and 82b the Percentage recycled/composted

4.5 All seven of the District Councils as well as the county Council are involved with this. There are a range of ways that through collaboration improved performance may be achieved. This might, for example be extending knowledge of best practice, joint commissioning (e.g BV199 surveys), and joint promotion/awareness campaigns. The targets within these indicators are currently being negotiated.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1 *Financial*

Estimated annual savings from the four day week arrangements are as follows:

Cost saving of overtime payments for refuse collection	£16,577
Cost saving of overtime weekend working vehicle maintenance	£19,150
Maintaining one (rather than 2) spare refuse collection vehicle	£22,254
<b>Total</b>	<b>£57,981</b>

# Item no.

Refuse crews currently subject to contractual overtime, which will cease under the new arrangement. In order to compensate refuse workers for loss of earnings, a one off contractual buy out has been agreed which has been costed at £27,598. It is proposed that this cost is met from savings in 2005/6.

The financial implications of the restructure to establish four clean and green teams have yet to be finalised. It is likely however that savings will be realised from this.

Consideration is being given to the environmental targets within the LAA as stretch targets. If this is agreed then a pump prime grant of £100,000 would be available (spread across all authorities), together with the opportunity to benefit from a share of the performance reward grant ( a total of £12M for the LAA), if the stretch targets are met.

## 5.2 *Legal*

The legal implications have been discussed with the Council's Monitoring Officer. He is satisfied with the approach proposed in the report and that matters have been risk assessed.

## 5.3 *Policy*

The proposals are consistent with Council policy, but they do involve changes to long-standing working practices.

## 5.4 *Risk*

A risk assessment has been carried out for the introduction of this scheme and all significant risks assessed.

It is important to recognise that these arrangements involve new rounds for the refuse collectors. Some teething problems are likely to arise as drivers become more familiar with their routes. This will be minimised however through training/awareness on the build up to introduction and on-the-ground support over the first few weeks.

## 5.5 *Communications*

These proposals will mean that for many residents their refuse collection day will change. This will be communicated well in advance of proposed introduction on 4<sup>th</sup> April together with explanation for the benefits of the service operating in this way.

# Item no.

It will also be important to appraise residents of the changes arising from the establishment of clean and green teams linked to each zone. This is proposed to be undertaken through presentations at area forums, residents associations and through *Infopoint*. An opportunity will be taken at these meetings to gauge current views on local environmental quality, and satisfaction with Council services in this regard.

## 5.6 *Corporate*

The action taken within this report supports several the Councils Corporate Objectives:

'Quality Service for our People'

'Clean and Tidy Communities'

'Better Transport'

'Making the District Safe'

The measures are intended to improve Council performance in the following areas:

BV199a Percentage of land having combined deposits of litter/detritus that fall below an acceptable level.

The draft Environmental Operations Service Plan (2006-9) includes stretched targets which reflect the new arrangements bringing, in the first year (2006/7) to 19% (the national benchmark) and within three years to ODPM (top quartile) targets of 10%.

BV199 b-d which refer to levels of graffiti, fly posting and fly-tipping.

BV86 Cost of Waste collection per household.

The draft service plan for environmental operations contains ambitious targets for reduction in costs, from the current cost per household of £48.01 dropping to £43.95 target for 2006/7.

BV89 Percentage satisfaction with standards of cleanliness.

Performance in 2003/4 was 50%, the draft service plan contains ambitious targets to raise this to 60% in 2006/7.

# Item no.

## 5.7 *Equality & Diversity*

No implications. Assisted bin pull-outs will continue for those in need, drivers will be aware of the households involved on their new rounds.

## 5.8 *E-Government*

No direct implications. The vehicle tracker system recently fitted to all refuse vehicles through Liveability Grant, will be of considerable use in programming new rounds and monitoring performance of the team approach to refuse collection.

## 5.9 *Procurement*

There are no procurement issues arising from this report.

## 5.10 *Sustainability*

Under the proposed arrangements, transport costs (and associated green house gas emissions) would be reduced through the more local delivery of services, and reducing the numbers of trips to the skip.

## 5.11 *Crime & Disorder*

The proposals are intended to improve the cleanliness and appearance of the local environment. There are clear linkages between environmental quality and crime and it is widely recognised (eg Wilson, Broken Windows Theory) that improvements in environmental quality can assist crime reduction.

## 5.12 *Human Rights*

No implications.

## 5.13 *Social Inclusion*

No implications.

## 6. Summary

No further development of the environmental Concordat is proposed, however the principles of cooperation on environmental operations between Councils it contains are now being extended with the emerging Local Area Agreement. Furthermore, lessons from the comparison work undertaken as part of the Concordat are being applied in Easington and considerable improvements to the Councils environmental services are envisaged as a result.

## 7. Recommendations

Members comments are invited on the issues raised in this report.

### **Background documents referred to:**

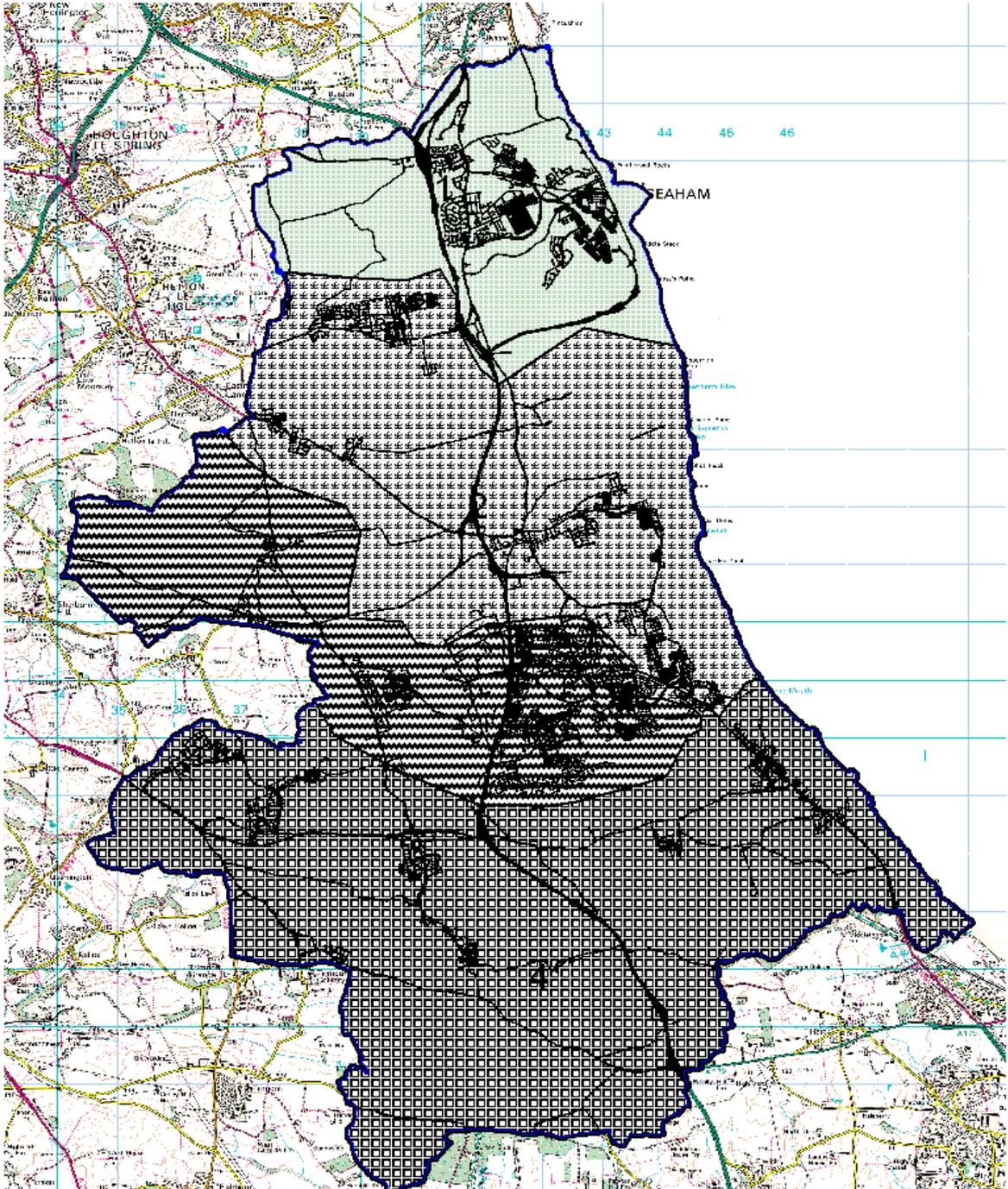
- i) Consultation Report on Proposed New Way of Working for Environmental Operations (September 2005, Members Library)
- ii) Concordat Files (Environmental Operations Manager's Office)
- iii) Service delivery Plan for Environmental Operations 2004/5 and draft plan for 2006-9.
- iv) Best Value Performance statistics 2003/4, 2004/5 (Q1 and Q2 unaudited), 2005/6
- v) Association of Public Service Excellence – case examples of four day week and zonal working (Directors Office)
- v) Case example : Care for Your Area, Stockton Borough Council (Directors Office)
- vi) Audit Commission. Staged Inspection of Environmental Services. Durham City, Easington and Sedgfield Concordat.

### ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

#### AUDIT COMMISSION FIGURES

	<b>EASINGTON</b>	<b>DURHAM CITY</b>	<b>SEDFIELD</b>
BV199a <b>Unacceptable levels</b> litter/detritus 2004/5	32% (qualified)	2%	19%
BV89 Satisfaction with Street Cleanliness 2003/4	50%	71%	65%
BV90a Satisfaction with Refuse Waste Collection 2003/4	89%	93%	92%
BV90b Satisfaction with Recycling Services 2003/4	89%	76%	73%
BV86 Cost of Refuse Collection 2003/4	£41.17	£35.11	£30.89

Audit Scrutiny-Review of Environmental Services/Reports/3/05/CS



Draft Proposed Zones