

East Midlands Efficiency and Improvement in Local Environmental Quality Programme

Efficiency Case Studies

September 2010



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership



About Keep Britain Tidy

Keep Britain Tidy is an environmental charity working to achieve cleaner, greener places for everyone. We campaign in England against litter and neglect, providing advice and leading others by inspiring practical action and better policy. With our origins in the 1950s anti-litter campaigns, we now focus on the range of issues affecting where people live including fly-tipping, fly-posting, graffiti, antisocial behaviour and abandoned vehicles. We run programmes such as Eco-Schools, Blue Flag and Quality Coast Awards for beaches, and the Green Flag for parks to demonstrate practical action. We are part funded through Government and other income is secured through training, consultancy and sponsorship. For more information on how you can make a change visit www.keepbritaintidy.org.

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (EM IEP)

Keep Britain Tidy

September 2010

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Introduction

The case studies contained in this report reflect the work that Keep Britain Tidy and the Development Group have been involved with during the project. The Development Group was initiated so that Keep Britain Tidy could work closely with councils to look at efficiencies they are currently conducting and how they could make further efficiencies whilst still maintaining standards.

Authorities involved in the development work were Bassetlaw District Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, North Kesteven District Council and Mansfield District Council.

Background

Following a request from the East Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (EM IEP), a proposal was submitted to develop a regional programme to tackle the poor levels of local environmental quality in the East Midlands as assessed independently by Keep Britain Tidy for the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The most recent published results from the national Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE) 2008/09 show that the East Midlands was second from the bottom of the English regions league table with an unsatisfactory LEQSE score of 62%.

Project aims and approach

The two identifiable work streams proposed as part of the regional improvement programme were the efficiency work stream and the improvement work stream. Both elements of work were intended to benefit the whole region, as well as carrying out discrete work with a small development group of authorities in the East Midlands to look at best practice.

Key findings, challenges and potential improvements from the work streams were to be fed into the East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (EM IEP) and the 'Efficiency Challenge Project'. The East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership would then work with local authorities on the recommendations and the measurement of potential savings and improvements made within this and previous reports.

Efficiency Case Studies

Bassetlaw District Council

Making changes in Bassetlaw

With the current economic climate looking very uncertain Bassetlaw, like many other local authorities, has closely monitored their streetscene budget in order to make efficiencies whilst maintaining the standard of service delivery. The council wanted to make the Street Cleansing Department more efficient and effective and improve public perception of street cleansing issues.

There were several initiatives that Bassetlaw District Council introduced to their working practices including:

- 1. Reducing sickness levels across Bassetlaw Council**
- 2. Going back to basics**
- 3. Revising and restructuring staff resources**
- 4. Improving public perception with satisfaction of street cleanliness**
- 5. Joint procurement and fuel saving schemes**
- 6. Devolving street cleansing duties to parish councils**
- 7. Reviewing bulky waste collection**

Bassetlaw is in the fortunate position of having to consider how best to utilise an extra £100,000 per year to their budget over the next three years, which has been awarded out of the participatory budgeting scheme.

1. Reducing sickness levels across Bassetlaw

On 1st March 2010 a new absence monitoring system was introduced across the authority whereby a third party organisation, First Care, monitor and report staff sickness to the authority. Previously, if a member of staff was off sick, they would call their line manager to inform them that they would not be in work that day. There were several issues with this type of reporting:

- Staff did not need to have medical confirmation of their illness
- The absence would only be reported on the day which did not allow for adequate planning to cover the absent employee's duties
- The absent employee's duties were either not covered at all or only partially covered, causing a backlog of work

- The system was open to abuse by some employees
- Previous system caused resentment from employees who frequently had to cover for colleagues who were abusing the system

Impact

The new absence reporting system means that the employee has to contact First Care and speak to a nurse giving details of their symptoms. The nurse will assess and advise the employee and then notify the relevant line manager by email or text message that the employee will be absent and the reason for absence. The reporting system is in operation 24 hours a day, seven days a week and so an employee can ring in at any time including weekends. This gives the line manager more time to arrange cover for the absent employee.

Lessons

Since the scheme was introduced, management have not seen any negative impact on staff morale. In fact, it has probably had a positive influence as abuse of sick leave has reduced. It gives those who are genuinely sick the opportunity to talk to qualified medical staff which can be reassuring. It is helpful to the managers and employees in that there is a clear process in place which is being well-managed.

Benefits

First Care gave a commitment to bring sickness levels down and the first three months into the scheme has seen an overall absence reduction of 22% across the council.

2. Going back to basics

In addition to their existing budget, Bassetlaw's Street Cleansing Department has been given £100,000 per year over the next three years from the participatory budgeting pot. Participatory budgeting is at the heart of the Government's drive to pass more power to local communities and help reinvigorate local democracy. It is also one of the activities to help comply with the new duty to inform, consult and involve (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (LGPIH) Act 2007 which came into force on 1st April 2009).

The main benefits identified in participatory budgeting projects are that they:

- Help to develop the skills, experience and confidence of those involved
- Can bring different people together across race, age, class and background

- Engender greater understanding of the complexities of public budgeting, including compromises and trade-offs
- Can achieve decisions better tailored to local needs because community views are built into the process
- Can help local councillors and council officials to work better with local residents helping them to become stronger community leaders

Impact

A public survey was carried out across the district to ask residents where they would like to see the extra funding spent. Residents were given three options: extra CCTV around the town centres; more funding to improve recycling or improved street cleansing services. The majority of residents (64%) voted for improved street cleansing and consequently the three year funding package of £100,000 per year was allocated to the street cleansing department.

The extra funding gave the department the opportunity to address public perception and concentrate on really improving the worst hit areas. It was also a good opportunity to increase and consolidate staff resources and equipment. Bassetlaw were able to invest in extra vehicles and staff which were deployed in the most visible parts of the district - the two main town centres of Worksop and Retford.

Lessons

The extra funding has allowed the street cleansing department to go back to basics. They deployed two additional teams of three operatives to blitz the town centres and bring them up to a high standard, paying a lot more attention to detail. In the first year they concentrated their attention on the main town centres of Worksop and Retford, focusing on areas which they had not previously had the resources to deal with such as back alleyways. The town centres have now been brought up to a good standard and require less resource to maintain those standards. This has enabled the cleansing teams to move further afield, focusing on the outskirts and residential areas.

Benefits

Both teams have been reduced in size from three to two which they intend to use on a more formal basis. The extra £100,000 has covered the costs of four additional staff and transport. It is the intention of the council that the extra resources will be

used to set up a web-based initiative promoted through the local press which will encourage residents to report litter 'hot spots'.

3. Revising and restructuring staff resources

Bassetlaw had a relatively high proportion of agency staff and a very low staff turnover rate. When employees retired or moved on the vacancies were filled through the use of temporary agency workers. This allowed the council to employ more staff resources for the same costs and was a very cost effective policy. However, new legislation due to come into force, which will give temporary workers the same rights as permanent employees, has forced the council to reassess its policy of using agency staff. Within street cleansing the extra staff resource has been very beneficial for the department and council members have agreed to keep the current level of staffing and so employment contracts have been offered to existing agency staff.

Impact

A recent staff review provided an opportunity to revisit the role of supervisors. The revised role was initially tested on a temporary basis and then formalised from April 2010. The service now has one Cleansing Manager in charge of street cleansing and waste with three Cleansing Supervisors. One supervisor is responsible for street cleansing and public conveniences, another is responsible for refuse and waste and the third supervisor is mainly responsible for street cleansing with some responsibilities on the waste side. The changes to the roles resulted in no additional costs when viewed as part of the wider reorganisation.

Previously the service employed dedicated public toilet attendants, but this role has now been absorbed into the more generic role of the town centre street cleaning operative.

The council is still considering options to further combine roles where possible. For example, the department is currently evaluating multi-skilling front line staff working within grounds maintenance, street cleansing and waste to enhance flexibility, efficiency and job enrichment for operatives.

Over the last 12 months, the majority of front line staff have undergone training and obtained an NVQ Level 2 qualification in waste management. Training for the remaining staff will be concluded over the next few months.

Lessons

Bassetlaw cleansing department has become more pro-active in managing the staff and this has had a positive affect. The number of operatives has increased from 23 to 29. Four of the new permanent positions (which are one year fixed term contracts) have been funded out of the £100,000 extra from the participatory budgeting. Recently council members agreed to an additional £50,000 to fund another two permanent employees previously employed as temporary agency workers.

Benefits

Anecdotal evidence suggests that public perception has improved since the extra resources were deployed. The training and opportunity to gain a qualification has had a very positive impact in terms of staff morale. The operatives are generally more motivated, more efficient and have a greater awareness of the 'bigger picture'. There is now a much clearer line of management and it is also hoped that future multi-skilling of the operatives will lead to higher efficiency levels, improved morale and greater customer satisfaction.

4. Improving perception

Although Bassetlaw had a fairly good NI 195 score (which indicates the level of litter and detritus on the ground) the public perceived the street cleanliness as relatively poor. In other words, residents thought that there was more litter on the ground than there actually was and that not much street cleansing took place in their area.

Impact

To try and improve public perception the department decided to issue branded uniforms to all frontline staff including street cleansing and grounds maintenance teams. Bright orange high-visibility jackets were chosen to ensure street cleansing staff stood apart from other workers that wore the more common yellow jackets. The new jackets also carried the authority name making the street cleaners highly visible to the public.

Lessons

Barrow operatives have recently been reinstated in the town centres and working times have been changed so that operatives are visible during peak periods. Previously they would cleanse busy areas before 8am and would therefore be away from the town centre during peak times and high footfall.

Benefits

Operatives with barrows are now present throughout the day. The barrows themselves are very noticeable and aid in making street cleaners more visible, improving public perception. Previously operatives would just carry a litter picker and black bag. The barrow is a large piece of equipment and is clearly visible whether the operative is nearby or not. Additionally, as the barrows can carry more equipment, this can be utilised, to improve standards and attention to detail. The department is currently assessing whether hand held vacuums and small hoses could be attached to the barrows to further improve cleansing.

5. Joint procurement

Over the last few years there has been a much bigger emphasis on mechanical sweeping. The council now has seven vehicles – one Johnson 600 for highway cleansing, one Scarab Merlin, one Scarab Minor, two Schmidt pedestrian sweepers and two applied green machines; all of which were acquired within the existing budget.

Impact

The previous policy was to acquire vehicles and equipment on operating leases. This has changed over the last 18 months and the council now uses capital purchase as the preferred option for such acquisitions, giving greater flexibility for long term and replacement planning.

Benefits

The council has also entered into joint procurement arrangements with other Nottinghamshire districts to purchase refuse freighters through a single supplier. This has resulted in savings in excess of £1 million across the county. Further benefits realised as a result of the joint contract include extended warranties and post-sale back-up and support. There is a similar joint procurement arrangement in place for panel vans, tyres and fuel, which has led to significant savings and added benefits for all the participating authorities. Evaluations of a jointly procured fleet management package are currently taking place (funded by EM IEP). All Nottinghamshire councils will use this joint procured fleet management package leading to further enhancement to the benefits and savings already being achieved through the overall joint procurement initiative.

6. Community involvement

Bassetlaw does not currently have a street cleansing enforcement team although the environmental health team send out fixed penalty notices for littering.

Impact

In view of this, the council has recently piloted a new scheme which gives the authority to a number of residents within an outlying rural village, to issue fixed penalty notices. Litter was identified as a problem in this area. The council saw this as a way of increasing the enforcement coverage within the district whilst engaging and empowering local communities.

Benefits

Following the success of the pilot, the councils' Environmental Health Neighbourhood Team is currently working with local communities to extend the scheme to other areas of Bassetlaw.

A number of the parish councils in Bassetlaw choose to take responsibility for their street cleansing. They each receive a grant from the council to carry out street cleansing and in some of the larger parishes where the funding is used to enhance other grants received to supplement services provided by the parish staff. This allows a more local presence of cleansing staff allowing residents get to know the operatives who work locally so they can report issues directly to them.

Additional information

Bassetlaw's refuse service has recently been reviewed by external consultants who found current efficiency levels to be good, with the service providing good value for money. This view was supported by Northampton University in their recent survey which showed Bassetlaw as having the lowest costs for waste services in the whole of the East Midlands region.

For further information contact Ian Roebuck at ian.roebuck@bassetlaw.gov.uk

Chesterfield Borough Council

Developing a more responsive service

Chesterfield has developed a more adaptable and responsive service that has a greater impact on the streetscene by integrating the street cleansing and grounds maintenance services. They have also looked at other ways of making efficiencies within the service through the following initiatives:

- 1. Merging street cleansing and grounds maintenance services**
- 2. Improved working practices**
- 3. Vehicle tracking**
- 4. Joint procurement**
- 5. Call centre smart working**

1. Merging street cleansing and grounds maintenance

In 2004 Chesterfield merged the street cleansing and grounds maintenance services to form a new joint service called Landscape and Street Services 'SpirePride'. Teams within both services had the ability and tools to undertake similar tasks so the subsequent amalgamation of street cleansing and grounds maintenance services provided the opportunity to remove wastage and duplication; it allowed for a more holistic service.

Impact

'SpirePride' is now well-established, with the main aim to refine, transform and enhance the local environment through community involvement, local council support and personal responsibility. The service includes:

- Clean, litter-free streets, transport corridors, parks, shopping centres and public spaces
- An enhanced appearance of the town centre landscape and gateways
- Improved working practices from the 'SpirePride' workforce
- Better partnership working between the council, residents, businesses and the local community
- Education backed up by enforcement

Lessons

The council's operational improvements were motivated by several factors:

- To reduce wastage within services
- To become more efficient and effective as a service

- To provide an improved and more flexible service to the local community

Benefits

The integration of the two services has realised significant cashable savings of £170,000 for the council consisting of £70,000 in 2004/05 and £100,000 in 2005/06. From April 2006 to the end of March 2010 the joint service has made on-going annual savings of over £280,000 from the use of technology, joint procurement and smarter, more efficient operational and day to day practices.

The service is now more responsive due to the wider placement of skills across the borough and the new shared responsibilities which allows for more effective deployment of staff.

2. Improved working practices

The council undertook a full scale review and an options appraisal which identified a number of potential savings within the service by improving working practices.

Impact

A key saving in Chesterfield has been identified through the review and subsequent amendments of cleansing routes across the borough have followed. Teams follow daily set routes in response to activity within the borough but it was found that market day in Chesterfield can be more effectively dealt with by reviewing the cleansing routes. There is also a dedicated litter picking team in the town centre that is responsive and flexible to deal with issues that arise.

Chesterfield also addressed staffing costs by reviewing the use of overtime and using agency staff more effectively. By using agency staff for manual operations it has saved the council up to £30,000 per annum through the reduction of weekend overtime.

Detritus was an issue within the borough so the council purchased a specialised piece of equipment called the 'Glutton'. This machine enables better cleansing of tree grids and hard to access areas as well as being able to pick up small pieces of litter such as cigarette stubs. The first two weeks after the 'Glutton' machine was put into service, levels of detritus reduced due to its extremely effective vacuum action. This purchase has also helped Chesterfield to work towards the county-wide Local Area Agreement target on detritus.

Management has recently introduced discussions on the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse (COPLR) and NI 195 into the regular team talks and include the topics as part of staff employment and development assessments. As a result, the operatives are now much more aware of the correct standards. Complaints have reduced and people have written to the council praising its work in keeping the streets clean.

The supervisor has been going out with the operatives more frequently, which combined with the COPLR and NI195 training has made the cleansing staff more aware of detritus and the impact it has on overall cleanliness. Operatives now take more pride and think about their area in a more holistic way.

The routes have also been looked at thoroughly and the number of cleansing staff in a particular area has been altered to take into account the local footfall. In the past Chesterfield received a lot of complaints about litter around market stalls. Since they increased the number of cleansing staff in the town centre, the number of complaints has reduced.

The supervisors now have regular meetings with the NI 195 surveyor to discuss problems and take advice; action can now be taken more quickly than previously. Communication channels are much more open and there is also a much greater understanding of what the issues are and how they can be tackled. Cost savings can be found through the reduction of complaints as less time is now spent on reactive work. Chesterfield is also reviewing whether grounds maintenance workers could boost the cleansing activity over the winter months. A deep cleanse at this point in the year will improve scores and should have long term advantages throughout the following months.

3. Vehicle trackers

Chesterfield wanted to introduce trackers on all their vehicles. After discussions with other councils who already use them and further research, Chesterfield purchased a tracking system that was suitable for their needs.

The main aim of the tracker units was to improve the security of vehicles and to increase efficiency and the effectiveness of cleansing routes. Fifty units were fitted on new and existing vehicles during a very successful test period. An agreed

corporate tracker policy was agreed by the workforce, unions and the council's cabinet, allowing for the roll out of the trackers.

The tracker information will be extremely useful to Chesterfield when trying to further optimise the cleansing routes and draw out more efficiency savings from within the service.

Benefits

At the time of writing, the tracker units are due to go live at the end of September/early October 2010, so the actual benefits remain to be seen. However, there are a number of expected benefits from having the tracker systems installed including:

- Better response times to incidents
- A reduction in mileage / fuel consumption
- Information on when vehicles are moving / idling
- Information on when the sweepers / mowers are in use

The cost of the tracker system was £10,500 and this was financed by the savings made by more efficient procurement of a new van fleet which resulted in a saving on transport costs for 2009/10 of around £21,000.

Chesterfield estimates the cost saving on fuel usage alone is likely to be in the region of £10,000. Not only is the service provided more effectively with more impact but there is a significant cost saving justification.

Other benefits of the tracker system include providing evidence against insurance claims and handling complaints about street cleansing or manual maintenance.

4. Joint procurement

Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire District Council have established a joint procurement agreement for the bulk purchasing of bedding plants. The plants are grown by Mansfield District Council and the bulk buying agreement between North East Derbyshire and Chesterfield has resulted in savings of around £4,500.

5. Call centre smart working

In the past supervisors were spending time on administrative tasks in place of the more valued tasks of inspections or 'hands-on' supervision of the operatives. The

ratio of operatives to supervisors was quite high which increased the demand to minimise time spent dealing with administration. An opportunity to reduce the admin time was identified in the call centre complaint system which included reports with a high number of errors. Call centre employees were sending complaints and queries to street cleansing when they should have gone to a different department. Conversely, issues that should have been dealt with by street cleansing were being delayed as they had been sent to the wrong team or department. Briefing notes and flow charts covering several topics were supplied to call centre staff along with general comments to help improve call centre performance. This guidance cut the number of misdirected complaints allowing for faster responses to the identified problems. Management now has more time available for inspections and supervision of cleansing staff.

Like most councils Chesterfield continues to look closely at more effective ways of delivering. There is still more work to be done on multi-tasking within the workforce, public perception and engagement. An action plan to improve public perception of cleanliness is currently being drawn up, which will include a re-launch of the 'SpirePride' service.

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Mansfield District Council

Creating a quality service

Mansfield District Council is focused on quality service and excellent customer service. It operates a lean service and has taken a pragmatic approach in recent years to reducing or maintaining the level of costs where possible. At a time when efficiency demands are increasing, Street Care Services have looked to shave costs where possible through reviewing and maintaining those services which have the most impact on the public.

In order to make efficiency savings Mansfield looked at several areas of the service including:

- 1. Staffing restructure**
- 2. Review of fleet vehicles and route optimisation**
- 3. Sub-contracting out specialist work**
- 4. Reducing back office costs**
- 5. Tackling litter and fly-tipping on private land**
- 6. Attention to detail**

1. Staffing restructure

Mansfield District Council's Operations restructure has taken several years of planning due to the changing economic climate and external influences. There is an unusually high ratio of operatives to supervisors and therefore minimal time for supervisory duties beyond the day-to-day management of operations. Activities around education and prevention have been restricted due to a lack of staff resources and it was these activities that had been instrumental in achieving improvements to date.

Following advice from Keep Britain Tidy, the council is planning to ensure that the service receives increased administrative support which would reduce the administrative burden on the supervisors and enable them to spend a higher proportion of time on other tasks.

Impact

The restructure to date has been very much top down and has yet to be completed. In the meantime there has been a slight reduction in the number of employees within

the department and temporary managerial cover; the restructure has had a somewhat negative impact on staff morale.

The budget has been reduced to £1.3 million for 2010/11 whilst still under a temporary structure and has a planned budget cut of £50,000. This saving has been met so far this year by reducing the number of agency staff that the authority is using to fill vacancies within the service. To date there is no substantial evidence to identify what impact this has had on service delivery standards.

Lessons

As a consequence of undergoing the restructure process some historic inaccuracies of budget allocation have been identified. However, overall there was no significant difference to budget allocations around staffing.

Benefits

As part of the ongoing growth of the team, it is intended to involve supervisors from other departments to monitor cleanliness standards at a neighbourhood level, which will lead to a greater efficiency and improved accuracy and quality assurance of the cleansing.

The whole restructure is being conducted in-house, and does not involve any additional resource. Vacancies are being managed and as staff leave or retire they are not being replaced by permanent staff until the restructuring is finalised. In addition to this the service has been tasked with making savings of £100,000 over two years, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

The impact of the changes to service delivery and to customer perception has not been detrimental to date. However, it is anticipated that there may be some negative aspects, including the number of additional unpaid hours being worked by staff (around 25% more than contracted week on week).

The majority of significant changes have been made in the last 12 months and although it is too early to be able to identify other changes in behaviour or performance. Total savings across the service appear to be in the region of £100,000. Based on the most recent figures there does not appear to be any negative affect on the NI 195 score for litter and detritus.

2. Review of fleet vehicles and route optimisation

Mansfield's Street Care fleet vehicles are leased through the council's fleet service and the lease period for some vehicles has, or is, coming to an end providing an opportunity for a fit for purpose review. This also links with changes to the delivery of town centre street cleansing operations and the appropriateness of vehicles in terms of size and versatility. For example, the vehicles will be assessed on whether they are able to clean narrow pathways, if they have a dual purpose or whether they need to have additional mechanical brushes. Tracking devices have also recently been purchased for new vehicles and are due to be installed, once the devices are in place there will be a review of cleansing rounds and again, an opportunity for route optimisation.

Impact

The intention of the review is to make the fleet more time efficient, fit for purpose, with double shifts, weekend working, and making the most of any dormant time.

Benefits

As a result of making the fleet more efficient, there will be a reduction in fleet hire costs, fuel usage and a cut in overtime although this is not yet quantifiable. It is anticipated that there will be significant savings to the service and that NI 195 standards will be maintained.

3. Sub contracting out specific schemes

Although at present all the Streetscene services are carried out in-house, some areas of specific concern are being cost effectively contracted out to schemes such as the Future Job Fund. For example, Groundwork in partnership with the council has established a Green Team which will be undertaking the cleansing of all link footpaths in the district. They will ensure that all litter and detritus are removed, as well as cutting back vegetation and removing weeds, which is then being monitored by Mansfield's Streetscene Supervisors; this is a category when surveying for NI 195 that always underperforms. Mansfield is also looking at other joint specialist schemes for example with Ashfield District Council around removing clinical and bulky waste.

4. Reducing back office costs

Mansfield District Council is considering sharing services such as HR, ICT and legal costs with neighbouring local authorities. Although this will be challenging, it is believed that having joint services will realise good efficiency savings.

Potential efficiency impacts

Looking ahead, areas where there may be additional savings include:

- Changing the ratio of supervisors to operatives to generate more effective and efficient Street Cleansing operatives
- Ensuring that the new mechanical sweeping fleet is fit for purpose by having the right size vehicles for the geographical area, population and land use types
- Investing in equipment that can be used for double shifts and managing manpower around this
- To make Sundays a standard day with no overtime costs
- To improve individual performance and regularly review fleet optimisation
- To adjust the frequency of cleansing and cleanse only when required. For example not cleansing more affluent (cleaner) areas as a matter of course
- To undertake a district-wide litter bin review to assess whether, for example, there could be larger bins and therefore less bin emptying
- Looking at options to divide the service into five area assemblies. The service will then operate at a neighbourhood level and have basic equipment fit for purpose whilst sharing more specialised equipment

5. Tackling litter and fly-tipping on private land

Mansfield recognises that public perceptions of overall cleanliness can be significantly affected by high levels of litter and fly-tipping on private land. However, clearing waste that is not their duty to remove means the authority bears the costs. Following development work with Keep Britain Tidy, Mansfield District Council was advised to introduce a strategy for tackling private land. Contacting land-owners and gathering intelligence from neighbouring land and property owners may provide simple solutions which have little or no cost to the authority.

The district council has employed Environmental Crime Lawyer, David Armstrong to deliver a seminar on tackling litter and fly-tipping on private land aimed specifically at senior officers to provide them with a greater understanding of the issues and advise them on the best and most efficient ways of dealing with them effectively and efficiently.

6. Attention to detail

Following the observational work carried out by Keep Britain Tidy as part of the EM IEP Improvement strand and subsequent report issued to the authority it was highlighted that there was a distinct lack of attention to detail by the Street Cleansing Operatives.

It was identified that when cleaning around street furniture, between pavement joints, tree pits and under guard rails for example, paying attention to detail can greatly improve perceptions of cleanliness of the residents and public.

In view of this, the Corporate Director and Head of Service spent a week on the streets observing work practices and discussing issues with operatives. Supervisors have also spent more time with crews addressing this issue particularly on roundabouts, around traffic islands and around street furniture. There has already been a noticeable improvement in the level of cleanliness and these sessions will be carried out on a regular basis in order to maintain standards.

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North Kesteven District Council

Creating efficiency through partnerships

North Kesteven District Council, in partnership with a third sector social enterprise and a private sector leisure services provider, has come up with an imaginative and innovative delivery model for a Countryside Ranger Service. The council has also been working closely with local parish councils on the Parish Partnership Initiative to strengthen joint working.

- 1. Watch NK**
- 2. Working with parish councils: Parish Partnership Initiative**

1. Watch NK

North Kesteven District Council entered a partnership with private leisure operator Leisure Connection Limited in April 2003 to operate its Leisure and Cultural services. The partnership has been very successful and has developed new services and initiatives. The partnership established a relationship with Hill Holt Wood, a social enterprise to provide an improved and enhanced Countryside Service under the brand Watch NK.

Watch NK was launched across the whole of the North Kesteven District in the summer of 2006. Watch NK Rangers are on duty seven days a week and are responsible for:

- Undertaking grass cutting and maintenance of the Stepping Out Walks network (a series of maintained pathways throughout the district which open up the countryside to the public)
- Managing specialist nature sites
- Managing North Kesteven's conservation volunteers programme
- Reporting suspicious activity to the police
- Reporting fly-tipping
- Reporting abandoned vehicles
- Issuing fixed penalty notices for litter and dog fouling
- Undertaking proactive and reactive litter picking

Rangers are often accompanied by learners on the Hill Holt Wood Education to Employment (E2E) Scheme which enables young people to gain real world job experience and learn respect for their local environment.

This unique improvement partnership came from the ambition of North Kesteven Council to address the issues that were important to residents through an initiative that provided an eyes and ears service for the Council. However, the Council recognised that it did not have the critical mass to deliver its vision, aims and objectives and therefore developed an extensive network of partnerships with other public authorities, voluntary organisations and the private sector including key input from the Local Strategic Partnership.

Impact

More than 80% of the population of North Kesteven lives in rural settlements or a market town (EMDA 2007). As a result, local communities have historically been self-reliant, with parish and town councils providing services such as litter picking within their village boundaries.

The Watch NK initiative was intended to concentrate on areas outside of the parish boundaries and to tackle environmental crime and management of the countryside network outside the 30mph limits. From the outset the parishes fed into devising the inspection programme for the Rangers by identifying litter and fly-tipping hotspots within their areas.

Lessons

Taking such an innovative approach challenged officers to manage the service in a way that went beyond the bounds of a normal client / contractor relationship. The management of the service includes:

- Regular monthly meetings between the three key stakeholders – North Kesteven District Council, Leisure Connection and Hill Holt Wood
- Hill Holt Wood providing regular reports on grass cutting, maintenance, responses to fallen trees and path obstructions, fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and dog fouling
- Mystery audits to ensure the quality of the service provision is acceptable for all partners
- Annual meetings to discuss the agreement and authorise the method of review
- Maintaining a comments and complaints log as part of the Leisure Connection Quality Management System
- Full-filling the requirements of the Countryside Service Statement

- Carrying out monthly value for money reviews
- Regular progress updates sent to North Kesteven members

Benefits

The key markers highlighting the success of the Countryside Service include:

- An increase from three grass cuts on the Stepping Out Walks network prior to 2007 to six cuts (undertaken on a qualitative basis)
- Rangers respond within 24 hours to complaints received about the Stepping Out Walks network
- Six client officer audits of the Stepping Out Walks network have been carried out and have found the networks in good condition
- A total of six events have been arranged by the Countryside Promotion Officer
- Rangers organised events such as 'pond-dipping' at Lollycocks Field and conservation days
- The Rangers attended nine parish cluster meetings held in the summer / autumn of 2008
- Hill Holt Wood undertake an annual audit of the complete Stepping Out Walks network, furniture, way marker posts etc. which had never before been undertaken
- The Branston Junior Ranger Project saw 93% of attendees successfully complete their Duke of Edinburgh Award exceeding the target of 50%
- Countryside Rangers have worked closely with the Council's Countryside Promotion Officer on a number of new countryside activities which have proved very popular. The Rangers have led some of the events such as Bushcraft, Bat Safari and a local nature reserve day which attracted 250 children and their parents. The involvement of the Ranger team has extended the events programme and provided a sustainable delivery model

Key markers highlighting the success of the Environmental Services are:

- Provision of a Ranger patrolling the district seven days a week
- Providing an additional 1,153 hours of E2E learner time undertaking litter picking
- During 2008 the Rangers identified and reported 227 cases of fly-tipping which the council collected within two working days

- Not only did the E2E learners provide an enormous additional resource in undertaking litter picking they collected 6.76 tonnes from the verges and lay-bys within the district

Watch NK benefits all parties; the local community benefit from the services, the E2E learners gain real world job experience and learn to respect their local environment and North Kesteven District Council receive a high quality, low cost service.

2. Working with Parish councils: Parish Partnership Initiative

The Parish Partnership Initiative was launched in spring 2007. Through this project North Kesteven District Council has made a commitment to parishes that it:

- Recognises the key role of local councils in helping to create and sustain viable local communities
- Affirms its support to the Lincolnshire Charter for local councils and its commitment to support local councils to take on new roles
- Agrees to develop mutual arrangements with local councils to help strengthen joint working

Impact

The Regulatory Services Department of North Kesteven District Council has produced a booklet for parish councils. The booklet clearly sets out the department's responsibilities, when and where the district council will carry out cleansing and lists contact details of appropriate departments and services in case of an issue. The council asks that the parishes fill in and return a monthly survey form stating whether the council has done what it promised and whether they are satisfied with the way they have been treated by the district council. It is similar to a service guarantee and offers an excellent form of communication between the district council and parishes.

Lessons

The system provides no official service level agreement between the parishes and the district council and so it can be difficult to show value for money. Currently, the district council offers funding on a first come, first served basis and 30 parishes (out of 80) have taken up the offer. For the parishes that carry out their own litter picking there is currently no way of assuring the standard of cleansing that the parishes undertake and standards can vary. For example dog fouling is classed as litter but the litter picker in one parish will not pick up dog fouling. The council therefore has to send out the contractor to deal with any reported incidents. Officers are in the

process of introducing a service level agreement to resolve issues that arise from different standards following an agreement from the council's scrutiny committee in 2010. It is hoped that the district council will then be able to prove value for money and expect good standards in return for the funding.

Costs

The parishes are offered the opportunity to apply for funding to pay for their own litter pickers. They receive 32p per head of population or 80% of the actual cost whichever is the lesser amount. Parish councils can also apply for funding to provide a parish dog warden. The dog warden will issue fixed penalty notices and carry out education. Fewer parishes take up this funding as some smaller parishes will share a warden.

Once the service level agreements are in place the council will be able to show value for money and properly cost the savings made by offering parishes funding to carry out their own cleansing.

With these initiatives in place the district is cleaner and public satisfaction in respect of cleaner streets and open spaces is likely to exceed the previous results from the General Household Survey when it is undertaken in 2010/11.

North Kesteven District Council has always been visionary and ambitious. In the past three years North Kesteven has demonstrated continuous improvement year on year and has provided a strong platform upon which to build for the future.

For further information contact Nina Camm at Nina_camm@n-kesteven.gov.uk

For further information on the Watch NK scheme go to:

<http://hillholtwood.com/in-the-community/watch-nk>

Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or would like to discuss any element of this report.

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