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Public Value Review of Street Cleansing

Final Report

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BACKGROUND

Street Cleansing has not been subject to a fundamental review for some years. In 2009 the Council worked with the Tidy Britain Group to review the method of service delivery and the equipment requirements. In 2010 a pan London study was commissioned by LEDNET (London Environment Directors Network) the work completed by the Tribal group concluded that the service provided reasonable service standards and value for money when compared with services across London. In 2011 a service review was carried out.

Street cleansing was identified as a priority for the pilot PVRs in this context and also in the context of the fact that this service is a very high resident priority and a driver of satisfaction with the Council overall. With an annual spend of c£3.5 million it is also a key area of interest when the Council is facing a significant financial challenge over the coming years.

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The Street Cleansing Public Value Review (PVR) was given a clear mandate by the sponsor, Chris Lee, to improve resident satisfaction with the service. The review analysed the existing structures and working processes within the department, undertook desktop research and benchmarking with other boroughs and invited residents to comment on their priorities for the service through a commissioned survey. The key lines of enquiry for the review were:

- making best use of our existing staff,
- establishing the right Street Cleansing approach for Merton,
- exploring new ways of working,
- how to improve residents' perception of the service and,
- exploiting potential synergies between departments.

1.2 The resident survey provided clear direction to the review, and a mandate for the department to prioritise issues of litter and fly tipping over other elements such as detritus (grit, decaying matter). The research also highlighted technological and procedural improvements which could enhance both service capacity and performance.

1.3 The recommendations of the review are:

- a) To redesign the service to address the needs of each location, to deliver a consistent level of cleanliness across the borough,

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- b) To review the management structure of the service to deliver reduced spans of control and clear line management responsibilities to improve performance and significantly reduce sickness levels,
- c) To implement a robust, evidenced approach to managing and benchmarking staff productivity,
- d) To realise a shift in the contact channels into the service through development of fully automated e-forms for online reporting,
- e) To explore options for implementation of mobile working within the department for Response Teams and frontline supervisory posts,
- f) To review branding to raise the profile of the service and its staff,
- g) To explore the development of the Garth Road site through the Asset Management Strategy, to improve facilities, maximise capacity and identify the potential to realise a capital receipts / revenue income from land made available.

1.4 The review demonstrates the potential to redesign the service within existing resources to more closely address the key resident's concerns of litter and fly tipping. The further reduction in sickness levels would result in significant savings in spend on agency cover, which could be reinvested within the service to deliver a more flexible, responsive and cost effective service. The overall cost of the service can be reduced, without diminishing performance, indeed it is suggested that resident perceptions of the service should improve through introducing a more reactive service which targets litter, automated reporting methods and better information flows to frontline officers.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Street Cleansing service is tasked with 'maintaining a clean and safe public realm'; comprising the removal of litter, detritus, graffiti and fly tipping through both manual and mechanical sweeping methods. The majority of the service is dedicated to the daytime operation, supplemented by a reduced evening service and night time service. The total cost of the service in 2012/13 was £3.25m.
- 2.2 There is a trial management structure in place with two Area Managers and supervision of frontline staff provided through four Senior Team Leaders. The substantive structure of the service consists of four Area Managers, however this was revised to provide additional supervision to frontline staff.
- 2.3 National Indicator 195 (NI195) scores suggest that the cleanliness of the borough compares well in the areas of litter, detritus and graffiti. But despite improvement to NI195 scores in recent years, the Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey shows satisfaction levels have remained around 57%, below that of other council public realm services although still above the London and outer London average for street cleansing.

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Scope

- 2.4 All the functions of the Street Cleansing department were included within the scope of this review, including existing daytime, night and weekend services. The review also sought to involve those functions within the Council, which either support or impact upon Street Cleansing i.e. Waste Services including Enforcement, Volunteers and Community Payback, Refuse and Recycling and the Garth Road Business Support function.
- 2.5 The review was tasked with looking at a number of different aspects within the service, as well as existing interdependencies and synergies with other services. These formed five key lines of enquiry:
- making best use of our existing staff,
 - establishing the right Street Cleansing approach for Merton,
 - exploring new ways of working,
 - how to improve residents' perception of and satisfaction with the service and,
 - exploiting potential synergies between departments.

Externalisation of the Service

- 2.6 One of the most significant questions to be posed by the PVR Programme is whether or not the service should remain within the council or commissioned through an external provider. The 2010/11 Tribal study showed that the service compared well with other London services in terms of service standard and VFM. The work undertaken in this PVR illustrates that further productivity improvements are being made and that if these continue the Council can reap all of the financial benefits as opposed to sharing these with a private contractor. However, the Council should retain a close eye on the mature market for cleansing services and be prepared to consider externalisation should further improvements and savings stall
- 2.7 There are a number of alternative providers for street cleansing services so externalisation of the service must remain a viable option. Post-implementation of the review outcomes, the service will need to demonstrate excellent value, and match, if not exceed the performance of competitors within this mature market. A further review in 12 months will assess whether the council should explore the delivery of the service through alternative means.
- 2.8 The review has highlighted several performance measures to guide the service's improvement activity over the next 12 months. These are informed by the findings of the review and evidence of best practice in other authorities:
1. Improve resident satisfaction with the service above current levels – as measured through the Resident Satisfaction Survey.
 2. Reduce percentage of land assessed as having unacceptable levels of litter to less than 5% (NI195a performance).
 3. Contain service expenditure within agreed budgets.

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4. Reduce reliance upon agency staff to cover annual leave and sickness.
5. Reduce sickness levels in manual staff to 8 days per FTE or less by 2014/15.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The review board met monthly with a smaller working group meeting on a weekly basis. The monthly review board consisted of:
 - Sophie Ellis – AD Business Improvement (Chair)
 - Chris Lee – Director of Environment & Regeneration (Sponsor)
 - Cormac Stokes – Head of Street Scene & Waste (Lead)
 - Brian McLoughlin – Waste Operations Manager
 - Colin Bartlett – Waste Services Manager
 - Sam Collis – Business Improvement Advisor
- 3.2 The review analysed the existing structures and working processes within the department, undertook desktop research and benchmarking with other boroughs and invited residents to comment on their priorities for the service through a commissioned survey. Workshops and meetings were held with key staff members and a further meeting was held with Veolia to understand their approach to delivering a Street Cleansing service.

4. KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

A) Finding: Service delivery must be tailored to meet local demands to achieve a consistent standard of cleanliness across the borough

- 4.1 The daytime service operates on a largely scheduled basis with 48 solo sweepers each allocated a 'weekly patch'. These are supported by six Response Teams (2 staff plus a vehicle) allocated across 3-4 wards, a deep cleansing team and large and mini Johnston Mechanical Sweepers which cover the whole borough on a scheduled basis. The limitations of this model are:
 - 4.2 **Scheduled Routes** - this ensures that the whole borough is swept each week, but is based on the assumption that every area of the borough requires a weekly sweeping schedule. In reality some may require frequent sweeping to maintain a satisfactory standard of cleanliness and other areas less often.
 - 4.3 **Focus on Detritus** – the model assumes a focus on detritus (decaying matter, grit etc.) however the Resident Survey commissioned through the PVR highlights resident's key concerns as litter and fly tips associated with bin collections. The current model does not allow sufficient flexibility to respond to varying demand across the borough.
 - 4.4 **Absence Cover**– the rigid nature of the operating model means that if a member of staff is sick or on leave their area is not swept and there is insufficient flexibility to provide cover. A flexible model would allow a more

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fluid deployment of staff which would increase the resilience of the service to changes in staff levels and reduce reliance upon agency cover. The service spent 770k on agency staff cover in 2012/13. A small amount was planned expenditure (£80k) however a large proportion of this was for agency staff to cover vacant posts (£219k), sickness (£177k) and annual leave (£294k). The 2012/13 budget for agency staff was £394k, so there was a significant overspend in this area.

- 4.5 The introduction of the Agency Workers Directive has increased the cost of employing temporary staff to the council, which together with the additional training cost, equipment and on-going agency contract management poses a question around the service's continued reliance upon agency staff and an opportunity to reduce cost which is already being realised. The key issue however remains the high levels of sickness within the department and lack of flexibility within the current delivery model to cover short term absences.

Recommendation A

- 4.6 Service delivery must be tailored to address the needs of each location, to ensure a consistent level of cleanliness across the borough. The chosen street cleansing approach should also focus on litter, as Residents stated that clearing litter in residential areas and along main routes should be the focus for the service. In some areas a more flexible approach is required to address fluctuations in litter, whereas in others the current scheduled approach remains the most appropriate method. The greatest sources of litter in the west remains associated with town centres, local shopping parades and spillage from refuse collections, with resident's perceptions of cleanliness being generally better than the east. This part of the borough would therefore lend itself to a more flexible service model, based around the use of mobile teams.
- 4.7 With a revised delivery mode, the daytime service would utilise 104 frontline staff; with a further 10 staff posts allocated as apprenticeships. The apprentices will increase the resilience of the service in providing a flexible staffing pool, which will provide cover for sickness and absence. Based on 2012/13 spend, this could save £177k in sickness cover and £294k in covering annual leave. A reduced agency budget could be retained for planned expenditure but, managers must be empowered to manage the operation within the staffing structure; incentivising active sickness and absence management.

B) Finding: Spans of control within the department do not allow for adequate supervision of frontline staff

- 4.8 The trial management structure was introduced approximately six months ago, with two Area Managers (split west/east) responsible for the overall management of the service, including the sickness and performance of 114 daytime and evening staff. There are four Senior Team Leaders with responsibility for daily supervision of frontline operatives, grading roads,

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reporting on issues and quoting for bulky waste collections. For day to day supervision, the spans of control are approximately 22 to 1, across a geographical area broadly equal to a quarter of the borough.

- 4.9 The review sponsor and lead met with representatives from a private street cleansing provider (Veolia), to understand their approach to delivering a street cleansing service. It was noted that Veolia's business model incorporates rigorous performance and sickness management, achieved through a target span of control of 15 to 1 for frontline supervisors. The Tribal Consulting review (2009) also found that spans of control in outsourced services were lower averaging 16 to 1, compared to 23 to 1 for in-house services.
- 4.10 The current spans within the service raise a question around the level of supervision that can be provided given the number of staff and the size of the geographical area over which they are spread. The role of the Senior Team Leaders also continues to expand to include grading roads, collection of fly tip evidence, and monitoring refuse collections. The role has developed to become the 'eyes and ears' of the service and provide key linkages to other services and stakeholders, but arguably to the detriment of direct staff supervision.
- 4.11 There is a split between the daily supervision of staff and their sickness management, with the latter falling to the Area Managers. This may lead to a lack of clarity around the line management of frontline staff as Area Managers are also expected to manage overall resources of the service, address escalated issues and allocate work within the department.
- 4.12 Levels of sickness peaked at 18.96 days per FTE in the last financial year. It is acknowledged that this is a manual service and likely to display higher levels of sickness than office based staff. Sickness has been reduced since then, and is highlighted as a key area to address going forward with targets for reducing sickness levels set at 14 days per FTE for this financial year, decreasing to 8 over the next 2 years. The service should seek to further reduce sickness beyond 2015 and regularly benchmark against other providers to ensure that it remains competitive.

Recommendation B

- 4.13 The current trial structure has delivered improvements within the service however spans of control remain significantly above the industry target. The service should review the existing management structure, to ensure that there is a satisfactory level of supervision for all staff, to enable more effective performance management and ensure that expectations of staff remain challenging. This should include reduced spans of control and a clear line management structure for all staff.
- 4.14 The current service plan target is to reduce sickness levels to 10 days per FTE from 2014/15. The medium term goal for the service must be to match, if not surpass, sickness levels within private street cleansing providers. The

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staffing structure and sickness management approach must be designed with this in mind.

C) Finding: There is not a robust approach to monitoring staff productivity to ensure that expectations remain challenging

- 4.15 Some private contractors including Veolia set frontline staff a target sweeping coverage of between 3.5km and 6km per day, depending upon the characteristics of each location. The service has chosen not to adopt this method, although historically a figure of 4km per day was used. The analysis suggests that a direct comparison is not possible at this stage and the absence of comparable data on productivity in reality makes benchmarking in this area extremely difficult. The onus however, remains with the service to demonstrate that productivity is effectively managed and enable meaningful benchmarking of the service.
- 4.16 Solo Sweepers are currently assigned a scheduled route, which they cover over a five day week. Improvements can be made in the way in which these are routinely monitored and to obtain evidence to support staff productivity levels.

Recommendation C

- 4.17 The service should engage with external providers and local authorities to understand their approach to performance management and target setting. The service must adopt a rigorous approach which will allow for effective benchmarking with comparable boroughs, building on the work of Capital Ambition and LEDNET (2009). The service should adopt regular benchmarking (quarterly) to demonstrate that staff productivity levels remain at least in line with that of external street cleansing providers.

D) Finding: There is a need to rationalise communications channels into the service

- 4.18 Customer Contact channels were analysed as staff reported that the number of reporting channels used by residents, made it difficult to manage their workload. Current communication channels into Waste Operations include:
- the council's Contact Centre (350 p/m),
 - by telephone – direct to Garth Road (200 p/m),
 - by e-mail – to a dedicated e-mail and to personal accounts (200 p/m),
 - e-forms on the council's website (25 p/m),
 - "Love Clean Streets" app (2 p/m),
 - Social Media i.e. the council's Twitter or Facebook account (1 p/m).
- 4.19 Waste Operations has an estimated 1000 contacts per month, with approximately half of these made through the Contact Centre. For Street Cleansing information is manually input onto the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM), which automatically transfers the information to

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the service's IT System, CONFIRM. There is however an issue that at present CONFIRM is not able to update the CRM, therefore when residents request an update from the contact centre the operator has to either check on CONFIRM themselves or transfer the call to the Garth Road back office.

- 4.20 A large number of service requests are also received by the back office team at Garth Road, which require manual receipt and input onto CONFIRM. Some requests are also received through informal channels and phoned directly to frontline operatives. The process is manually intensive and error prone; 28% residents stated their dissatisfaction upon reporting an issue, due to a perceived lack of action. Simplification of the process could be achieved using existing IT functionality, which would also present an opportunity to realise financial savings not just in Street Cleansing but across Waste Operations.

Recommendation D

- 4.21 The Customer Contact Programme seeks to reduce avoidable contact and design cost effective, efficient and user friendly channels for residents to communicate with the council. The review has highlighted actions that can be achieved in the short term without the need for additional IT investment.
- 4.22 The council has procured the Achieve e-forms software, and a range of e-forms have been designed and implemented across the council. The majority of these forms send the information via e-mail or populate a spread sheet held within a service. There is however, the capability to fully integrate e-forms with existing IT systems, which negates the need for manual inputting. As an initial step the service should look to automate their existing e-forms, which will reduce the reliance upon the business support officers to input requests to CONFIRM.
- 4.23 In order to realise this channel shift and reduce the demands upon the business support staff, the service must put in place measures to actively channel service users through the Contact Centre and council's website using the new online forms. This will require a behavioural change for service users and staff, and should be supported by a targeted communications campaign and refresh of existing documentation. This is essential if the service is to increase current use of the e-forms and reduce reliance upon the Garth Road Business Support Team.
- 4.24 Longer term, further efficiencies can be realised through the Customer Contact Programme with the implementation of an integrated Customer Relationship Management System and enhanced Contact Centre. This may allow further savings in the Garth Road Business Support Team through reductions in workload.

E) Finding: Information Flows within the service are largely paper based and inefficient

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- 4.25 The Value Stream Mapping workshops identified delays in the flow of resident's reports to frontline operatives. These were highlighted as follows:
- CONFIRM reports are printed three times per day, the latest being at 5pm. Therefore if a report is received after 5pm it will not be printed until 11am the following morning – *request delayed by up to 18hrs*,
 - Printed reports are only handed to crews at the start of their shift at 6am each morning; a report received after this will not be handed to a crew until the following day – *request delayed by up to 24hrs*,
 - When a CONFIRM report has been completed the crew hand the annotated print out back to the office, where it is allocated to a part time member of staff to 'complete' on CONFIRM. Due to capacity and part time nature of the role reports are often not completed for several days – *request closure delayed by up to 5 days*.
- 4.26 The service aims to respond to fly tip reports within 24hrs, however this relies upon a significant level of manual 'workarounds' i.e. Area Managers phoning through reports to crews, which detracts from their other duties. 83% of residents said that it was easy to report an issue, however only 56% said that they were satisfied with the council's response. 28% of residents stated their dissatisfaction was due to a perceived lack of action.
- 4.27 The standard process for the flow of information is reliant upon manual intervention and paper based processes, which limit the department's ability to respond to resident's reports. The main consequences of this are that;
- there is a need for manual interventions to ensure that reports are received in a timely manner,
 - often multiple reports can be received for the same issue, as it has not been promptly completed,
 - crews can often pick up fly tips and receive the CONFIRM reports for these the following day at which time they are of no use and,
 - Enforcement officers can spend time investigating fly tips that have already been collected, as they are still 'live' on CONFIRM.
- 4.28 A more efficient flow of resident reports to the frontline is needed to remove delays within the process and reduce the reliance upon staff members to manage information flows.

Recommendation E

- 4.29 Mobile working infrastructure would allow frontline operatives to receive and close work requests directly on CONFIRM. Reports made through the Contact Centre or through a fully automated e-form would achieve near instantaneous communication with operatives and provide the basis for greatly improved response times. The improved response times would reduce duplicated reports and the need for manual interventions, freeing up Area Manager time for management of staff and escalated issues
- 4.30 There are several systems available on the market which could meet this need, including CONFIRM CONNECT (an additional module of the existing

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CONFIRM system). Alternatively CONFIRM could be accessed through a tablet computer or laptop via the Citrix Platform. Further work is required through the Flexible Working Programme to identify the right IT solution, which should be supported by a business case. The perceived benefits of utilising mobile working within the service are:

- automated allocation of CONFIRM reports to area based crews,
- CONFIRM reports received instantaneously by crews,
- crews could update, raise or close CONFIRM reports on site, reducing duplicated reports and failure demand (enforcement),
- reducing administrative burden through removal of printing reports, physical allocation reports and closure of reports on CONFIRM and,
- financial savings in mobile phone use.

- 4.31 The service should identify the true costs of utilising mobile working software including support costs, however there are some potential options available which would not require the purchase of additional software. Accessing CONFIRM via Citrix for example would potentially only require the cost of the tablet computers and IT support time to implement and train the new users.

F) Finding: Visibility of staff and communication activity is important to raise the profile of the service and manage resident's perception

- 4.32 86% residents stated that it was important that they regularly see street cleansing staff in their local area, which suggests that service visibility is an important element of resident perception. Branded uniforms are in use across the service however there are opportunities for further branding and campaign material, for example the sides of cage vehicles and the introduction of a 'brand identity' for the service such as the 'Merton Clean Team', or similar.
- 4.33 The Veolia benchmarking highlighted the importance of organisational culture in encouraging staff to take personal responsibility for the outcomes delivered; this is already evident in some areas of the service. Veolia developed this further through the use of area based teams and name badges which encouraged staff to connect with their customers more directly.

Recommendation F

- 4.34 The service should review its branding to maximise opportunities to raise the profile of the service and its staff. A rolling Communications Plan should be developed to utilise existing council channels and local media, highlighting successes, campaigns and service messages.

G) Finding: There is potential to improve facilities and maximise the use of the Garth Road Site

- 4.35 The Street Cleansing service is based at Garth Road Depot, across two temporary buildings, which comprise office space, a meeting room, toilet and shower facilities and a communal area for frontline operatives. The facilities

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are basic and there is potential for a permanent building to be developed on the site increasing both building capacity and the quality of facilities.

Recommendation G

- 4.36 The development of the Garth Road site should be explored further through the Asset Management Strategy to improve facilities and building capacity.

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