

BUDGET & PERFORMANCE PANEL

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY PILOT STUDY

23 October 2007

Report of Head of City Council (Direct) Services and Head of Corporate Strategy.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise members of the City Councils involvement in a national pilot study aimed at responding to residents perceptions about their local environmental quality

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That members note the intention to take part in this study**
- (2) That members consider, at a future date, consider the outcomes of the study and make recommendations as to how they may best be incorporated into the future working of the Council**

1.0 Introduction

One of the Council's over-riding priorities, as set out in its current Corporate Plan, is to improve the cleanliness of our streets and public places. There have been significant improvements in a range of performance indicators, however, it is recognised that the our residents do want to see higher standards.

The City Council has been invited to take part in a national pilot study to try and establish much stronger linkages between residents' perceptions of local environmental quality, what the authority does to meet those perceptions and how those things are measured.

2. Report

Lancaster City Council invests a significant amount of resources to make our district a cleaner and healthier place. (£7.78M net revenue and £12.45M capital in the 2006/07 financial year). This is one of the Council's current Corporate Plan Medium Term objectives; improving the cleanliness of our streets is one of the Councils current over-riding priorities.

Whilst the most recent survey of customer satisfaction showed an increase in satisfaction with street cleansing, many of the measures used to track environmental quality do not directly correlate with residents' perceptions of local environmental quality (i.e. at neighbourhood level).

Lancaster City Council is one of four authorities (the others being Southwark, Sheffield and Allerdale) that have been invited to take part in an LGA sponsored pilot study, the outcomes of which will be rolled out nationally. Full details of the pilot study are set out in Appendix A but in summary, it will involve the authority working

with the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE), LGA (Local Government Association), ENCAMS (Environmental Campaigns – ‘Keep Britain Tidy’) to:

1. measure the local residents perception of local environmental quality in a variety of local situations
2. relate those perceptions to local standards of service delivery
3. test the extent to which ways of measuring customer perceptions, standards of service delivery and service efficiency can be related at neighbourhood level.

Poulton has been identified as the local area whose characteristics best match with the intentions of the pilot study. It is anticipated that the groundwork will be completed by December '07 with a final completion date of the pilot phase by 31 March 2008. After this discussions will be held involving all partners to discuss how the findings might be progressed.

The first planning meeting for the project is scheduled for Thursday 11th October and the outcomes of that meeting will be reported at this meeting of the BPP.

Summary

The invitation to take part in this pilot study is recognition of the Council's ongoing corporate commitment to improve the environmental quality of the district.

The study will provide a methodology for best determining how to meet the needs of local people and in particular address their perceptions about their local environmental quality.

The outcomes of the study will complement the Council's commitment to the roll out of neighbourhood management across the district and will, it is hoped, prove to be of benefit to authorities all across the country.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Outcomes from the pilot study will have a positive impact upon residents' perceptions of local environmental quality
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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time has been re-allocated in order to support this valuable pilot but this will not have any direct bearing on service delivery. The cost of carrying out the preliminary survey is still being evaluated and will be reported at the meeting but it is not expected to be significant. The support of the Poulton Neighbourhood Management Environment Sub-Group is being sought.

The outcome of the study should give the Council an informed judgement on the achievement of value for money and efficiency in services such as street cleansing and this in turn may raise issues for consideration as part of future years budget setting.
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SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has nothing further to add.
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LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from involvement in this pilot project.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has nothing further to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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A PROPOSAL

for a Pilot Study that will test the feasibility of a Voluntary Local Performance Management Framework (VLPMF) covering aspects of Local Environmental Quality that contribute to the Quality of Life.

1.0 Introduction and Background to This Project

- 1.1 This proposal has been prepared at the request of the Local Government Association. The proposal is based on discussions involving the Local Government Association (LGA), representatives of the NEON (National Environmental Officers Network) group of local authorities, Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS- the environmental charity which runs the Keep Britain Tidy campaign) and the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE.)
- 1.2 Among other activities, ENCAMS is an adviser on Local Environmental Quality and Management to the Government and to approximately 150 local councils and other land managers in the UK and Europe.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The LGA's Greening Communities work programme for Streetscene and Public Space has the following key objective:

'To improve perception and measurable achievement of councils' performance on streetscene and public space, with an established framework for celebrating and promoting positive action with a) a community focus and b) an objective of achieving accreditation for inward investment.'

- 2.2 At the January 2007 NEON meeting, LGA officers invited a range of organisations involved with the design, management and improvement of the local environment to discuss a proposal to encourage all Councils to improve their performance in streetscene and public space management.
- 2.3 Amongst the range of issues identified was the need for:
- increased community and customer focus and accountability by public bodies;
 - local choice of benchmarked indicators at district and sub-district levels;
 - the need to build on existing, proven and adopted protocols and networks; and
 - the ability for indicators to cover customer perceptions, service outputs, standards and process management.

3.0 Aims and Objectives of the Project

- 3.1 The aim of this project is to produce a voluntary, LGA-recommended, Local Performance Management Framework (VLPMF), based on existing, proven methodologies and support networks, which allows local choice to be made from a library of customer-focused indicators.
- 3.2 The VLPMF will contain a library of Local Indicators related to Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) which is designed to offer greater choice and flexibility for local authorities to respond to local priorities. Importantly, it aims to:
- link to the many other useful tools that have been developed by a range of organisations and to create a framework to enable more effective benchmarking

between authorities; and

- accommodate the intention within the Local Government White Paper for a reduced set of national indicators.

3.3 The objectives of the study are:

- to measure customer **perceptions** of Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) and related Quality of Life issues in a variety of local situations;
- to relate those customer perceptions to local standards of service delivery (**product**) in relation to LEQ;
- to relate local standards of LEQ service delivery to **process** measures of service efficiency; and, to test the extent to which measurement protocols for customer perceptions, standards of service delivery and service efficiency can be related at neighbourhood level.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Customer perceptions will be measured using a self-completion questionnaire developed by ENCAMS, covering the range of issues outlined in Appendix 1. This will be administered by partner authorities, who will select which elements of the questionnaire they wish to use, and the area(s) in which they wish to use it.

4.2 Local standards of LEQ service delivery will be measured using proprietary 'Local Environmental Quality Survey' techniques that are employed in the national Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE).

4.3 Service efficiency will be measured using a mixture of:

- existing protocols developed by APSE, wherever applicable; and
- protocols developed in consultation between partner authorities, APSE and ENCAMS during the course of the study.

4.4 Particular attention will be paid to the feasibility of measuring service efficiency, and of developing tools for data collection, at neighbourhood level.

5 Timetable

5.1 Following the agreement of Project Plans between individual Partner authorities and ENCAMS/APSE, partners will aim to complete the work content by December 31st 2007. It is anticipated that work will continue beyond that date in order to ensure project completion, with a final completion date of this pilot phase being 31 March 2008. After this, discussions will be held involving all partners to discuss how the findings might best be progressed.