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***Empowerment and Performance in
Local Government:
The Impact of Empowerment
Strategies on Service Improvement***

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PhD

2009

***Empowerment and Performance in Local
Government:
The Impact of Empowerment Strategies on
Service Improvement***

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of the requirements of the
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for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact an empowerment strategy may have when applied to public sector employees delivering Environmental Services.

The study employs a case study method as its central research strategy with ten sample local authorities chosen as strategic informants. The key issues considered were the relevance of the appropriate structure within the organisation, the importance of employee engagement, the impact of the management or leadership style, and the opportunity for implementation of an empowerment strategy.

Primary data collection was through twenty eight semi-structured interviews including Heads of Service, Service Managers, Supervisors and Front Line Operational Employees.

Secondary data included Best Value Reviews, Comprehensive Performance Assessments, as well as Annual Audit Inspection Letters specific to the chosen sample.

The research findings support the assumption that an empowered and empowering workforce can contribute to service improvement and also support the assumptions that other key drivers must also be in place to enable and facilitate that improvement. The research recognises those additional key drivers as engagement, corporate ambition, leadership style, training, resources, external constraints, task complexity, rewards and levels of and opportunities for innovation that contribute to the performance level of the organisation. Some or all of these drivers are evident in the sample authorities both from assessment reports as well as interview data.

The research findings also suggest that there are many interpretations of empowerment with the most common understanding being simply the opportunity to change the way things are done but only after prior consultation with line managers. Line managers in the study group wanted to voice support for empowerment but in reality their actions fell short of an explicit strategy with a clear definition. Involvement in decision making by the front line employees was evident but fell short of a declaration of empowerment. The golden thread of empowerment appears to be dangled just out of reach of this group.

The study contributes to existing empowerment literature but also to the specific impact of empowerment in a public service environment. It is important because it focuses on a service area that is experienced and used by the vast majority of citizens. The impact of poor or declining environmental services as well as high quality and improving environmental services is immediately noticeable by all that experience it. It is a service where a strategy of empowerment should bring about a noticeable change in quality.

Key Words: empowerment, performance, local government, service improvement, innovation, leadership

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A special mention to my family Elaine, Adam and Jamie for not complaining about the missed evenings out and weekends away whilst I was sat upstairs tapping away at the keyboard like a hen pecking at corn or sat downstairs with my head buried in yet another academic tome bereft of pictures or humour.

And finally my thanks to the University PGR staff who were all excellent and responsive to my requests for information.

DECLARATION

Statement 1

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Statement 2

This thesis is the result of my own investigations in relation to the theory (employee commitment) in study, except where otherwise stated and acknowledged within this thesis and its bibliography appended.

Statement 3

I hereby give consent for my thesis (if accepted), to be made available electronically and manually for the purpose of teaching, researching, photocopying, inter-library loan, and for the title, abstract and summary to be made available to outside individuals and organisations so long as acknowledgement to the author is made.

Signed:.....(candidate)

Date:

Dr John Fenwick, Guy Brown and Dr Jason Gooding.

(Supervisors)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

1.1 Research Background

During the author's course of employment he is often invited to seminars where high performing local authorities enlighten those performing less well with their best practice model. Inevitably the term **empowerment** of employees is put forward as one of the main reasons for the particular authority's success. This was the original motivation to undertake an in depth study of this well promoted yet often misunderstood strategy. The thesis investigates the impact of empowerment strategies on service improvement in local government. Current measures of local authority service level and user satisfaction are based on a stringent inspection regime supplemented by performance indicators at a local and national level and customer surveys. The metrics resulting from those processes are often used anecdotally as the accepted measure of service quality by both the user and the delivery organisation.

1.2 Research Objectives

The central aim of this study is to consider *the impact an empowerment strategy may have on service delivery improvements in local authorities*. In support of this, its objectives are;

- To critically review the existing literature in the field of empowerment strategy.
- To explore managers' perceptions of the link between empowerment and service quality.
- To use a case study research strategy in building theory by interpreting narrative drawn from the case studies. These empirical data will be used to "match" back to the metrics.

1.3 Research Question

Can empowered and empowering employees in local government have a positive impact on service improvement? To explore any possible relationships to this research question, the researcher will conduct a review of current literature within the field. This will be supplemented by primary and secondary research to draw together a full study of the subject of empowerment and service improvement in order that the study can be guided towards a productive conclusion. The primary research forms the main body of the study consisting of case study analysis of ten

local authorities undertaking environmental services delivery. Performance data for each authority over the life of this study is utilised to determine the performance journey of each authority. The perceptions of employees working within those authorities are explored using semi-structured interviews. In each authority three levels of employee within the structure were interviewed. However two authorities on the day were only able to provide two employees resulting in a total of twenty-eight interviews. The interviews explore ambition, performance, management style and perceptions of levels of empowerment and opportunity for discretion. The secondary research considers the impact of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda on local authorities from the Best Value Reviews through Comprehensive Performance Assessment on to the recently introduced Comprehensive Area Assessment.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research therefore is to identify the levels of empowerment exhibited in local government and the associated drivers to implement such a strategy. The study will use data from ten sample authorities in a 'family group' to ascertain whether there is evidence of empowerment and whether that can be theorised as a contributory factor towards service improvement within those authorities. In order to do this the study requires an understanding of the nature of empowerment theory and application as well as the appropriate measures of performance within the study authorities. The study will also consider other possible contributory factors both external and internal which may affect opportunity for improvement.

1.5 Structure of this Thesis

The research is arranged in chapters. This chapter section covers the intent of the following chapters with a brief overview of the remaining chapters in the study.

Chapter One – Introduction to the Thesis

Chapter One focuses on the provision of detailed briefs on the proposed research study providing an overview of the structure of the thesis with brief explanations of the contents of each of the following chapters. It also examines the research question and background.

Chapter Two – Government Policy Context

Chapter Two describes the central government policy context with brief overviews of the various performance assessment models introduced during the life of this study. The local government modernisation agenda saw the introduction of many white papers and policy objectives however this study concentrates on the Best Value Regime (BV), Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) and Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) as the main sources of comparative quantitative data. Nationally determined performance measures and indicators became the central means of determining performance improvement or decline and the chapter also considers the resultant impact on service improvement and the operational effects of target driven improvements.

Chapter Three – Literature review

Chapter Three will focus on providing a strong theoretical review of various literatures relating to the research topics of empowerment and performance improvement within the public services. It will evaluate existing research works and include reference to any links to relevant central government literature on the subject. It will examine various methods employed to measure service improvement and consider both the theory of empowerment as well as the application of that theory in a public sector environment. It will examine work undertaken by (Bowen and Lawler, 1991), (Barbee and Bott, 1991), (Peters, 1989), (Seiber *et al*, 2004), (Foley, 2006), (Lashley, 1999), (Rhys Andrews *et al*, 2005) amongst others. Findings from these works will be critically assessed to enable the researcher to observe possible inconsistencies and / or consistencies in the possible benefits and / or disbenefits of an empowerment strategy. The chapter begins with a brief description of central government's drive for performance improvement followed by a detailed assessment of the value of innovation in regard to service delivery improvement followed with how innovation links to the need for an empowered workforce and enlightened leadership. The style of leadership and how that style can impact positively or negatively on facilitating an empowerment strategy is also considered. The impact on performance and how central government relates to the impact of empowerment to performance is discussed. The chapter closes with a discussion on whether organisational considerations could play a part in enabling an empowerment strategy and the value of highly engaged employees.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four will focus on the choice of research philosophy, methodology and methods associated with this kind of research. The chapter will discuss various research stances and will justify the choice of philosophy. It will also define and justify the choice of research methods for data collection and analysis including selection of strategic informants. The chapter will detail the use of a pilot informant and the justification for the use of semi structured interviews as an appropriate means of primary data collection. Central government metrics will be justified as a vehicle for the provision of service improvement measures. This chapter will also consider the local government modernisation agenda from 2001 through to 2009 to analyse the central government context in relation to the research.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five will draw together the secondary research data from central government metrics for the sample authorities and align this with the interview data from the strategic informant interviews. The chapter will present the findings of the primary research analysed to relate to the researchable question.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six will discuss the links to both the literature review and the theory. It will consider the relevance of the findings in relation to the researchable question.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven will aim to draw conclusions and possible recommendations in relation to the study. It will relate to the relevant data analysis from chapter four. This chapter will also focus on identifying any research limitations associated with the study and provide recommendations for further research in this area as well as promoting the original contribution to knowledge provided by this research.

CHAPTER 2: GOVERNMENT POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Local Government Modernisation Agenda

Under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, the Audit Commission may carry out inspections of an English best value authority's compliance with Part 1 of that Act. Part 1 includes ***the duty on best value authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way their functions are exercised***, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Current government policy requires measurable improvements to be made to public service delivery under the modernisation agenda. During the life of this research 2004 through to 2009 central government has revised and repackaged Inspection regimes seeing a transition from Best Value reviews to Comprehensive Performance Assessments ending up with Comprehensive Area Assessments. These have been supplemented with Corporate Assessments, Annual Audit Letters, and Peer Reviews. Local Authorities have been assessed against both National and Local Indicators starting with Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) which have transformed into National Indicators (NI's). Every three years the Audit Commission has undertaken a Best Value User Satisfaction Survey. This has been replaced in 2008 with a Place Shaping Survey. This section outlines each of the key respective inspection and assessment models in the context of service delivery improvement.

A detailed summary assessment of the impact of the LGMA from Best Value through CPA and on to the recently introduced CAA forms the subject of two papers issued from the Audit Commission in March 2009 namely 'Final Score' and 'The Final Test'. The results and statistics that are used in the following sections are extracted from those reports.

2.2 Best Value

The best value performance framework introduced in 1999 required councils to deliver services to clear standards by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. All best value authorities were expected to achieve continuous improvement in all their services. Councils were required to carry out best value performance planning and to undertake fundamental Best Value Reviews (BVRs) of all services, to identify what needed to be improved and how they intended to go about it. (Audit Commission, 2009).

The Audit Commission report *Changing Gear* found that many council services were judged as good or excellent and there were encouraging signs that best value was helping drive improvement. Progress against many best value performance indicators had been strong and inspection showed that at least half of councils were set to improve services further. The Audit Commission however considered that there were still too many under performing services judged as poor or fair.

Best value councils were free to decide which services to look at, when to look at them and how to look at them, within a broad framework of the four Cs – challenge, compare, consult and compete. However, *Changing Gear* found that, while the best value model was based on self-review by councils, followed by external challenge and verification by inspectors, it was a one-size-fits-all approach. In order to determine whether local authorities were implementing Best Value practice a series of in depth inspections were undertaken. These were taken on a thematic basis following the particular local authority having undertaken their own challenging review and evaluation. The Best Value reviews were reality checked and a rigorous assessment was undertaken by District Audit inspectors. Local authorities were scored on two elements. The current quality of service and whether a strategy had been adopted which would guarantee that the service would improve. One of the measures taken to determine this was a detailed consultation with customers. Therefore each authority needed to prove that they intended to and could deliver improvements as a key performance measure.

In 2000/01, councils undertook almost 4,500 BVRs. However, one of the key problems was that councils chose to review relatively small service areas, which meant that there was often no strategic overview of performance in important service areas. In 2001/02, following advice to focus on more cross-cutting areas, the number of BVRs was reduced to around 2,400, but a significant effort was still being deployed in inspecting these reviews. Some 639 best value inspections took place in 2001/02 across single-tier and county councils alone. If best value was to work better, and address concerns raised by councils and stakeholders, there needed to be fewer, more strategically targeted inspections.

2.3 Comprehensive Performance Assessment

In December 2001 the government introduced CPA Local Government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*. It emphasised the role of

councils as community leaders, and announced a new performance framework to develop community leadership and prudent decision making.

In 2002, the Audit Commission consulted on its proposals for CPA. For the first time, it intended to produce a single measure of overall performance for single-tier and county councils in England. The outcome of a CPA assessment was an overall rating of excellent, good, fair, weak or poor.

The Audit Commission's description of a 'typical' council in each CPA group is as follows:

Excellent councils

Excellent councils have shown that overall they provide high-quality local services, especially in areas of national priority such as education and social services. They have effective leadership and management arrangements and are strong in maintaining their performance. They are clear about their priorities, which are linked to local needs and aspirations. Council finances are well managed and are directed at agreed priorities. Excellent councils are often better at achieving more for their communities through the delivery of crosscutting projects, often in partnership with others.

Good councils

Good councils tend to have strong services overall and know where they need to make improvements. These councils provide effective leadership and management. Good councils have high levels of ambition and are more focused on what matters to their communities. To become excellent, these councils need to strengthen their ability to manage and apply resources where they are needed most and work more closely with partners to achieve more for their communities.

Fair councils

Fair councils provide reasonable services overall but they need to deliver significant improvements to ensure that local people benefit from more consistent and reliable delivery. For these councils, their current performance is generally stronger than their ability to make further improvements. To become good or excellent councils they need to identify the things that really matter, focus on them, and manage their performance more effectively. These councils need to make better use of their resources, particularly their staff, and to improve their leadership skills and managerial impact.

Weak councils

Weak councils tend to provide low standards of service for local people and have limited ability to make those services better. There are few weak councils that currently have the ability to move quickly out of the weak category. Weak councils may have one or more services that are performing reasonably well, but they do not spread this better performance from one service to another. Their priorities are unclear, do not reflect local aspirations and are not adequately tied to resources. Developing their political and managerial ability to tackle their problems is a top priority for weak councils.

Poor councils

Poor councils offer inadequate services and do not have the leadership and managerial capacity or focus to improve them. Performance management is ineffective and resources are not used to the best advantage of the council. Most poor councils are trying to make improvements to services, but lack the focus and clarity of priorities to do so effectively. Engagement with local people does not translate into positive changes or better services for the community. Without external support, the efforts that many poor councils are making to improve services for their citizens are unlikely to lead to lasting change.

Source: (Audit Commission, 2002b, pp.3-4)

Boyne and Enticott, (2004) considered The Internal Characteristics of Local Authorities in the Five Comprehensive Performance Assessment Groups.

The research undertaken considered whether councils categorised as 'poor' are significantly different from their counterparts that have been rated more highly? In order to answer this question they first identified relevant internal characteristics on the basis of the Audit Commission's diagnosis of the results of the CPA. This suggested that councils fall into different groups because they vary on their leadership, management, clarity of priorities, community engagement and extent of crosscutting / departmental working. They then derived measures of these variables from an extensive survey of local government officers, and tested whether responses to the survey differed consistently across the CPA bands.

The statistical results suggested that the internal characteristics of the five CPA groups are mostly the same. Only around a quarter of the tests indicated significant

differences in the organisational attributes. The clearest differences were in the areas of performance management and clarity of organisational priorities. In these respects, excellent and good councils are markedly superior to fair, weak and poor councils. Even in these cases, neither the poor nor the excellent emerged as truly distinctive. Rather, the poor were statistically indistinguishable from the fair and the weak, and the excellent were very similar to the good. Thus measures of organisational characteristics suggest that there are not five CPA groups but two: one which scores highly on 'management and priorities' (the excellent and the good), and one with lower scores on these variables (the fair, weak and poor).

How comprehensive performance assessments were carried out

The CPA framework measured the effectiveness of the whole council in terms of the way that it provided services and worked in partnership. Its focus was on the leadership, systems and culture that lead to improved services, as well as on the current performance of specific services. The management and leadership aspect is of key interest in respect to this study.

The elements of CPA

CPA drew on a wide range of evidence to produce assessments of 'current performance' on a range of key services. This evidence included inspection judgements from the Audit Commission and other inspectorates, auditor judgements, performance indicators and Government assessments of councils' performance plans. These service assessments were combined to provide an overall assessment of the council's current service delivery performance.

CPA also relied on a 'corporate assessment', which resulted in a judgement about a council's 'ability to improve' (this meant a council's ability to lead its community, and to improve services) The corporate assessment began with a 'self-assessment', which required councils to answer four simple but challenging questions about their own performance. The self-assessment was followed up by an external 'corporate assessment', carried out by a small team which included an auditor and inspector as well as officers and councillors from 'peer' councils. The outcome of the corporate assessment was a high-level report on the council's strengths and weaknesses, and a judgement about its ability to improve.

The experience of local people

One of the guiding principles for the Commission and other inspectorates is to focus on the public, and on the way that people experience public services. The experience of local people was reflected in a number of ways in CPA. Inspectors routinely took account of the experience of service users by talking to them directly, holding focus groups, carrying out surveys of users, and by trying out the services for themselves. Performance indicators which measured satisfaction with services have also been included in the CPA framework. Corporate assessment teams also met and talked to users and their representatives to help them to assess councils' ability to improve.

Bringing it all together

The judgements about current performance and about the council's ability to improve were combined to form an overall assessment of each council, placing each of them in one of five categories: excellent, good, fair, weak or poor.

These categories and the underlying scores were publicly reported by the Audit Commission, and councils were fully expected to use the findings of their CPA as a basis for improvement planning as well as performance. The Commission also gave clear guidance to councils about the best ways to communicate the final results of CPA to local people.

CPA was designed to give the most complete picture yet of the performance of single tier and county councils.

The report, *Final Score* (2009) considered how the best councils achieved their high levels of performance. Many references were made to willingness and the drive to improve performance.

The majority of the 149 Councils assessed had set themselves demanding targets for improving the quality of life of their citizens. These ambitions were leading councils to change the way that they worked in order to provide better services.

Most single tier and county councils were also found to have made effective use of their capacity – that is their staff, money and other resources – and so had the 'raw material' available to do almost anything that they wanted to do. They also made use of additional resources from outside their own organisation, by linking up in

partnership with other public, private and third sector voluntary organisations, and by encouraging local people to participate in improving their own quality of life through community consultation and neighbourhood forums.

The clearest reference to empowerment is discussed in the section related to managing performance. The elements of performance management – targets, indicators, plans and so on – were accepted as important, but they were not enough by themselves. In councils that were considered as good at managing their performance, staff and councillors have a shared understanding of the council's priorities and of what they need to do to realise those priorities. Because people knew what mattered most, they could solve problems and overcome barriers quickly. These councils recognised that the point of managing performance is not to hit targets and fulfil plans as ends in themselves – but to do so in a way that produces high-quality services for local people.

At the outset CPA set out not only the way in which the Audit Commission, in partnership with the other relevant inspectorates, planned to assess and report the performance of councils, but also a differentiated approach to regulation. Councils that were performing well under CPA would enjoy reduced audit and inspection regimes, and their associated fees, and be granted greater flexibilities and borrowing freedoms by central government.

The corporate assessment was new. It measured the overall ability of the council, since this was seen as a key driver of improvement. The assessment examined a council as a whole and assessed its effectiveness as a community leader and how well-run it was as an organisation. It drew from the Audit Commission's experience of corporate governance inspection and the benchmark successfully used for peer review in the The Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) Local Government Improvement Programme. It assessed the way in which councils managed their own corporate performance and responded to service failure, and gave assurance about the capacity of a council to improve without the need for external scrutiny.

The use of resources assessment was also new. Judgements were made by auditors, drawing on work carried out to fulfil their duties under the Code of Audit Practice

In CPA 2003, a qualitative assessment of continuous improvement statement was introduced and reported alongside the CPA category and scores for all single-tier and county councils. This was a short narrative noting the progress the council had made since the previous inspection. This was subsequently developed and called direction of travel in the 2005 Harder Test after being widely supported by local government consultees on the grounds that it gave an up-to-date perspective and provided a further incentive to improve.

CPA was introduced for district councils in 2003/04. A tailored approach was developed that was proportionate to their size and scope, and reflected the cost of assessing 238 English district councils. It was also rolled out over a longer period than CPA for single-tier and county councils.

Following the publication of the CPA categories for all single-tier and county councils in 2002, 2003 and 2004, the Commission changed the framework for CPA for these councils in 2005. It followed consultation on the principle of strategic regulation, which stated that the Commission would:

- help drive improvement in public services, while still providing assurance that minimum standards were being met and resources were being properly used;
- champion the interests of service users, by assessing performance from the public's perspective;
- increase the value for money that public services provide, by sharing best practice, exposing waste and poor practice, and challenging inefficiency;
- provide better value for money from regulation itself, by targeting audit and inspection more effectively to where it was most needed and could have most impact; and
- work closely in partnership with those that the Commission audited and inspected, with other organisations supporting improvement, and with other regulators.

A new CPA framework was introduced for districts in 2006 following the principles of strategic regulation. From that point, the Commission only undertook re-categorisation in district councils when a council requested it, based on significant

evidence of improvement, or when the Commission identified evidence of significant deterioration in performance.

From 2006, the approach for districts included a council peer inspection in the assessment process. Unlike the previous corporate assessment, it did not include a diagnostic assessment of relevant service areas.

The last inspections for single-tier and county councils based on the CPA – The Harder Test assessment framework took place in 2008/09. The final CPA assessments were published in February, March and June of 2009.

As with all of the Inspection and assessment models introduced by central government a key objective of CPA was to act as a stimulus for improving public services.

This study is primarily concerned with inspection and assessment of Environmental Service delivery. This element is assessed as a block in CPA. The environment service block assessment covered many different aspects of the key services that councils provide, such as planning, waste management and transport.

CPA has been widely recognised as a stimulus for improvement, both by practitioners within the sector and observers. For example, in a survey carried out by IPSOS Mori for the Commission in 2008, almost all the chief executives who responded believed that CPA had contributed in some way to improving local public services with 42 per cent stating that CPA had ‘a great deal of impact’ Externally, in 2008, Sir Peter Gershon recognised that the Commission had achieved its objectives of stimulating service improvement and efficiency in local government.

‘There is no hiding place because of CPA ... CPA has shown you can improve services, even while making efficiencies.

Over its lifetime, CPA was not acting in isolation. The wider Local Government Modernisation Agenda, as outlined in the Local Government Act 2002 and the Local Government White Paper Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services in 2001, had many components of which CPA was one. The Audit Commission Inspectors concluded by saying that it was ultimately local councils whose efforts were responsible for the improvement in local services. *Final Test* (2009).

Tackling poor performance was a key aim of the Modernisation Agenda, with CPA the means of identifying poor performance. At the start of the CPA period, there was concern that a significant number of councils were failing to deliver adequate services to their residents. This impression was supported by the results from the first year of CPA, when 9 per cent of councils were rated as poor. These councils were likely to be failing in delivery of key services, in corporate management and in their use of resources. In some cases, individual services in these authorities had already been identified as weak and were either receiving external support to improve, or had been removed from the control of the council.

Although the reasons for poor performance are complex and often deeply rooted, they are often related to ineffective political or managerial arrangements or weaknesses in a council's culture. Performance may not be weak across the board and, in 2002; some councils that had been delivering poor performance were already beginning to improve. However, some councils needed assistance to begin and continue the drive to improve.

Councils that were rated poor, or weak with a low score for capacity to improve, became subject to a wide-ranging engagement process led by the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This involved the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister appointing a lead official, supported by a relationship manager from the Audit Commission, to help councils formulate a recovery plan in which external sources of support were identified. A government monitoring board then observed the improvement in the council's performance, making recommendations where necessary to the minister, other government bodies and the council itself. Underpinning the engagement process was the ultimate possibility that ministers could use statutory powers to direct a council.

As well as going through the engagement process, poorer performing authorities often changed their senior staff. This change, in part, resulted from the transparency of performance under the CPA regime, which revealed the poor performance of existing senior teams. In an evaluation of the turnaround process, **new leadership was identified as an important driver of improvement**. But it would only work where other senior managers were committed to recovery and the skill set for the post was matched to the problems of the council.

Some of the poorer performing councils took a strategic perspective on the use of external inspections, valuing the perspective they brought. This approach included

commissioning reviews from the I&DeA and others to help review recovery strategies and identify opportunities for change. Some managers and local politicians found the inspection and assessment process empowered them to act in problem areas where previously they may have been constrained. In an evaluation of the Beacon Council Scheme, frontline staff reported that inspection and CPA scores were extremely influential in encouraging them to improve their service.

Analysis of CPA results as part of a three-year evaluation of 15 turnaround councils showed that these councils were well on their way to recovery by 2004, with a faster rate of improvement than other councils. At the end of the CPA period, four of the turnaround councils were 4 star, six were 3 star and five rated as 2 star. This demonstrated that each of the councils significantly improved the services that they provide.

An assessment of the 13 councils classed as poor in 2002 suggested they were a diverse group, but they had certain things in common that contributed to weaknesses in leadership. Ineffective political arrangements occurred where structure or behaviours had the effect of limiting councillors' capacity to exercise effective leadership and take collective action to address shortcomings. Ineffective managerial arrangements resulting in poor leadership was often found to result from either too much change or too much inertia. Following a CPA assessment, there were notable changes in senior council management and leadership. These changes included a clearer vision by senior management and councillors and greater confidence among staff in their senior management's ability to deliver this vision. Improving internal communications was also found to be crucial in building a common awareness of problems and their solutions.

Though CPA has been widely recognised as a stimulus for improvement, it has not however been without its problems and weaknesses. The CPA framework placed great weight on performance indicators. These could never cover the full experience of service delivery. However, they provided important measures of what was being achieved. Performance indicators tended to focus on process and output and did not cover the outcomes which were expected. Additionally, over time, there was a danger that councils focused on improving performance indicators rather than the full range of services. It was also possible for councils to focus their resources on those services that could be improved slightly. This potentially could be at the expense of focusing on the specific needs of service users. This was a by-product

of a system where small movements in indicators could lead to the gain or loss of a star.

Hambleton et al, (2009) argue that there is considerable evidence to show that UK local government has improved over the last decade or so. By 2006 seventy-eight per cent of local authorities had achieved three or four star ratings and for the first time since CPA began in 2002 no local authorities were placed in the lowest CPA category, (Grace and Martin, 2008). However the central government policy of top down target driven model of service improvement has important limitations.

(Bardach, 1977) suggests that when faced with such a performance regime the system will be played to gain advantage. Ticking the correct boxes may satisfy the inspectors whilst at the same time masking an actual decline in the quality of local services experienced by local citizens and service users, (Hambleton et al, 2009).

A common theme running through the survey of senior stakeholders carried out by Ipsos MORI for the Commission was that CPA had run its course. It had been a powerful and successful driver for change, but it needed to be replaced by something that reflected the changing context in which public services operated. The Commission had already recognised that, as the demands and risks facing public services change, inspection and assessment must keep pace if it is to continue to provide a relevant stimulus to improvement and value for public money.

2.4 The Transition from CPA to CAA

During the transition from CPA to CAA the impact of any changes to local government structures in two tier areas will need to be carefully considered both as part of the transition and the development of a new framework Audit Commission (2008) Furthermore CAA represents a fundamentally different approach to assessment which will be area based, risk focused and more forward looking than former assessment activity. The new framework needs to take account of how services are delivered across areas and must be focused clearly on outcomes.

In the new performance framework, while the risk assessment will be area focused, use of resources and direction of travel assessments will continue to assess individual organisations. Use of resource assessments are already carried out in fire, police, primary care trusts and some other health bodies as well as councils. Direction of travel assessments are only carried out in councils. The Commission is

working towards a closer alignment of use of resources assessments across the local services sectors so that a more consistent picture can inform area assessment in future, although different financial frameworks inevitably mean absolute comparability is not possible. The proposals for these two continuing assessments were intended to help smooth the transition from CPA to CAA.

The need for reliable and robust data will continue to be of great importance in the new framework. With greater reliance on local performance management, it will be even more vital for local partners to be basing decisions and planning ahead using a reliable evidence base and more timely information.

There were a number of ways in which the Commission utilised the final year of CPA as a positive step towards CAA. They highlighted those aspects of CPA that will be central to CAA namely;

- engagement with citizens and service users;
- partnership working and cross-sector collaboration;
- local performance management; and
- improving value for money.

The Commission and all regulators recognised that the 2008 Local Government White Paper and the Bill to be a significant opportunity for all those responsible for local services to focus on improving outcomes. The new performance assessment framework therefore sets out to support this.

In summary the Key elements of the new performance framework as described in the 2008 Local Government White Paper are:

- Strengthening accountability to citizens and communities by adding to the best value duty so that authorities, where appropriate, must secure the participation of citizens in their activities.
- Providing citizens and communities with timely information and better opportunities to hold delivery partners to account.
- Developing a small set of national indicators measuring citizens' perspectives.

- Ensuring inspectorates have a strong focus on citizen experiences and viewpoints in their work as well as on outcomes and encouraging improvement.
- Clarifying national outcomes and priorities with a clear mechanism for translating these into local targets by: defining in the comprehensive spending review a clear set of government priorities with a single set of 198 national indicators; and agreeing through LAAs up to 35 specific improvement targets for each local area.
- Ensuring transparent, timely reporting to citizens and streamlined reporting to government, through statutory guidance, to ensure that local authorities report regularly to citizens.
- Promoting the use of real-time information in local performance management and reporting to citizens and streamlining requirements to report statistical and financial information to government.
- Supporting improvement and responding to poor performance by ensuring greater sector and partner-led improvement support, and taking decisive coordinated action where poor performance threatens delivery.

2.5 Comprehensive Area Assessment

The focus for Local Authorities is now Comprehensive Area Assessment which came on line in April 2009. Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), will focus on local partnerships and assess the future prospects for areas. CAA will also assess and report on the performance of councils and fire and rescue authorities. More information on the CAA framework can be found at

www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa

In February 2008 I&DeA commented on the proposed Comprehensive Area Assessment initiative in a paper entitled *Challenging Ambition for Areas*. The report made reference to the local government white paper *Strong and prosperous communities* and how that paper presented an important opportunity to improve the quality of life in places and deliver better public services. The white paper positions local people at the heart of a new performance framework for localities. Public services are to be reshaped around citizens and the communities who use them; people are to be given more control of their lives, consulted and involved in running services; their views and experiences taken into account in assessing performance;

better informed about the quality of services in their area and empowered to call local agencies to account if services fail to meet their needs. This is a further example of the Government using empowerment as a driver for improved service delivery.

At the same time expectations for public services continue to rise faster than available resources. As a result citizens are having to adjust to a world of choices, trade-offs, rationing, and constraint, from access to care through to the disposal of waste.

The I&DeA consider these trade-offs and choices are best settled primarily at local level – and any new process for assessing council/partners' performance should recognise and support local decision-making and the drive for improvement at local level. Whilst there will always be a need to report progress against national priorities, the main focus of the new assessment regime would now be outward-looking to citizens.

The new assessment process therefore focuses on the things that matter, recognising local political choice and providing clear incentives for councils and their local partners to develop innovative local solutions to local challenges. Importantly it must enable them to better serve the needs of citizens.

The report suggests that Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) starts the journey; focussing on performance against a streamlined set of indicators that reflect national ambitions for citizens, a prioritised set of improvement outcomes negotiated through local area agreements (LAAs) and a measure of value for money. For CAA to really drive improvement and empower and engage citizens, the report concludes that it also needs to capture more explicitly citizen satisfaction and distinctly local priorities, including priorities reflecting local political choice. CAA needs to assess how these different elements are taken into account in making choices and trade-offs, and the impact these have on citizens.

Councils and their partners have a responsibility to improve the lives of local people and in order to do this their performance will be measured by a set of 198 national indicators. Localities should therefore develop an understanding of progress against these indicators. A simple method of doing this might be based on the percentage of indicators against which performance is either stable or improving.

Alternatively, localities may wish to measure net improvement. Some localities may want to examine their own performance on individual indicators against other areas, perhaps those defined as nearest neighbour in terms of comparability, to provide useful benchmarking information.

Steve Bundred, Chief Executive of the Audit Commission and the man charged with overseeing the new regime believes that CAA could be the answer to every harried public sector professional's prayers. There will not be an 'inspection event' to prepare for, with assessors gathering material from publicly available sources and organisations own performance management data. Instead a 'single assessment framework' will assess the services provided by councils and their partners, yielding reports – published via a new web reporting tool – that are expected to 'resonate with the public'.

"We want to ensure that the public is more engaged with the CAA than it has been with the CPA," 'The CPA has been a powerful driver of improvement in local government.' (Bundred 2008)

Other, less glamorous reasons for the reform, he admits, include the fact that the CPA was delivering diminishing returns in terms of improvements. It was also costly; the Audit Commission hopes that the new framework will help meet a government target to cut the cost of inspection and regulation by 30% by 2009.

When commenting on the ambitions for CAA in a paper to Public Finance magazine in 2008 Bundred commented;

"We all know that the places we live in could be better, but that priorities for improvement are not the same everywhere. In some areas the key concerns of local people might be crime, in others it might be unemployment. We expect our local Council to take a lead in defining priorities and working in partnership to address our concerns because the issues that matter most are unlikely to be solvable by the Council alone."

"If there is no overall score for the risk assessment there is a danger that the CAA could prove to be less effective than its predecessor in motivating people to bring about change. There is a danger, too, that in those circumstances the direction of travel and use of resources judgements, for which there will be a simple score that makes comparability easy, will attract more attention than the risk assessment."

Clearly if the CE of the audit commission has concerns that CAA methodology may not effectively motivate councils to bring about change there is a danger that front line employees may become less engaged in the process.

Guidance refers to its relevance for 'routine functions' and 'significant one-off decisions' – that just about covers everything. (Jones, 2009).

The new duty is expected to 'embed a culture of engagement and empowerment' – a seismic shift comparable to those already achieved around performance management and partnership working.

Cliff Dalton Senior Manager of CIPFA's Policy and Performance Networks is however more confident that CAA will drive service delivery improvement. In Public Finance magazine January 2008 p14, he comments;

"Councils cannot afford to rest on their laurels. From 2009, the CPA will give way to Comprehensive Area Assessments. Under the CAA, the scope of the 'use of resources' judgement will be widened to reflect the public's experience of service delivery, regardless of whether the provider is from the public, private or third sector or a mixture of all three."

"There will also be a broader definition of resource use, to include natural resources, people and information technology, and an added emphasis on sustainability and the Council's approach to managing and minimising its environmental impact."

"No one person or authority has the answer for everything but you would be amazed by the improvements that might come from a slight change in approach, process or reporting arrangement suggested from elsewhere."

The public's experience of service delivery he refers to can be enhanced by providing a flexible and innovative approach through an empowered workforce.

It is clear that CAA will be the key driver to embed this new culture. Not that there will be a specific CAA 'score' on implementing the duty to involve – there won't be. But the first question – 'How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?' – will be key to answering the third and most crucial question – 'What are the prospects for future improvement?' Why?

As the inspectorates explain 'If local needs are not understood well enough, it is unlikely that the right improvement will occur in future.' Public Finance magazine January 2008.

The Inspectors go on to outline what CAA will assess in this area:

- How well councils and their partners know and engage with their communities, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised
- The extent to which priority outcomes have been defined and their delivery assessed with community involvement
- The effectiveness of partners' co-ordination of their engagement and communication.

Dalton (2008) also asks whether the CAA Inspectors have the right skills to be able to assess partners' own and any independent evidence of citizen engagement?

There is much in the CAA framework about using the Web to communicate the results of CAA, but that immediately excludes about the 51% of those earning £10,000 a year, or less, or the 71% of those aged over 65 who have never used the Internet? CAA will undoubtedly play a big part in determining a council's performance however it will still leave opportunity to hide behind poor performance through inability to exert influence over partners. The lack of a clear judgement, rating or score could leave CAA becoming a mere deficit model relying on narrative and perception as the measures of service delivery performance.

The key assessment components of CAA

As discussed the CAA assessments will draw on the new national indicator set of 198, and will also be heavily influenced by the views of residents and those using services.

At the heart of the new framework will be a joint-inspectorate assessment of the prospects for the local area and the quality of life for local people, referred to in the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, as the area risk assessment. The improvement priorities in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) will be key. The area risk assessment will judge the likelihood of the targeted improvements being achieved and, where appropriate; will identify barriers to that improvement. Depending on local priorities, the assessment could cover issues such as reducing health inequalities; increasing the availability of affordable housing in the area; reducing crime; improving educational attainment; attracting investment in jobs and skills; or reducing the area's carbon footprint.

The area risk assessment will not be restricted to the Local Area Agreement priorities, and is likely to reflect the inspectorates' assessment of the quality of engagement with local communities and the risks to people in vulnerable circumstances in the area. It will be publicly reported, including to the local strategic partnership collectively, as well as to its constituent organisations.

CAA will focus on the delivery of outcomes that are the responsibility of councils either alone or working in partnership with others. This means that CAA will consider, for example, health and well-being; community safety; sustainable communities; economic development; local housing markets; and children's and older people's services in addition to council services. Other service or organisation-specific assessment frameworks, for example schools; colleges; social housing and residential home inspections; health service and police force assessments, will continue but will be developed alongside CAA to avoid any duplication.

The new performance assessment framework is being introduced to provide a clearer focus on the quality of life for local people. Most existing frameworks have looked at individual organisations, such as councils; primary care trusts; housing organisations; police and fire and rescue authorities; and how well they deliver or commission their services. However, the way local services are organised has changed and more than ever they are working together to solve problems, improve services and increase efficiency. Challenges such as improving public health; making communities safer and stronger; regenerating economies; regenerating neighbourhoods; widening participation; tackling climate change; safeguarding adults and promoting their autonomy and well-being; and ensuring that children and young people have a promising future, all require local services to work together more. In doing so, local services are being challenged to demonstrate that their priorities and decisions are genuinely shaped through a real understanding of the needs of citizens, people who use services and taxpayers.

CAA will pay particular attention to how well people whose circumstances make them vulnerable are engaged with their local services. This will include the needs and interests of people who are at greater risk of lower quality of life outcomes. This will be reflected in how well-matched services are to their needs and the means available to those people to influence decisions and service provision. Bespoke services delivered by an Empowered Workforce to an Empowered Community?

CAA will reflect this growing leadership role of councils and provide an independent judgement on how well local people's interests are being served. The Commission recognises, however, that quality of life and opportunities to improve it often depend on personal action by individuals, not just on the quality of services available. They will take account of the opportunities to influence those services and how access to services is supported.

CAA will help to engage citizens and people who use services by:

- concentrating on what local people care about most;
- gathering intelligence about their experiences in order to assess local services. Some of this evidence will be gathered via the new place-based survey the replacement for the three-yearly best value performance indicator customer satisfaction surveys, and other surveys, and some will be gathered from councils' and their partners' own monitoring of the views of people who use and pay for services. Such information will carry significant weight in CAA so that local people feel they have real influence in how local services are assessed;
- assessing the quality of involvement of local people, including those in vulnerable circumstances, to check whether their voices are heard and heeded; and
- providing information to people about the findings from CAA so that they can be better informed about the quality of local services and be better placed to exercise choice and influence.

Where there are concerns about the prospects for future improvement, identified through the area risk assessment, there are a wide range of options available. CAA judgements will be used to help decide what action is most appropriate. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the concerns, these may range from support within the public service sectors, such as peer review, through inspection or, in more serious cases, government intervention. This was set out in *Strong and Prosperous Communities*.

In the Audit Commission's recent discussion document on the transition from CPA to CAA, concern was expressed that the risk assessment might encourage risk-averse behaviour. If this is real then it could have a negative impact on any empowerment strategy for the service provider. Yet if the negotiation of the Local

Area Agreement results in challenging improvement targets, it will in many cases be necessary for the local strategic partnership to be innovative and take well-managed risks to achieve them. The Commission however makes it clear that they will ensure that the area risk assessment recognises the positive benefits of using innovative approaches where appropriate; will support the use of stretching targets; and will challenge the level of ambition where necessary. A culture where innovation and ambition is supported and encouraged also compliments high levels of autonomy and empowerment. It is clear therefore that the proposals from central Government are set to reinforce and monitor an Authorities ability and willingness to improve service delivery through this process.

CAA Performance information

A core element of the new performance framework for local services is a single set of 198 national indicators to measure the progress of local authorities and their partners in achieving national priority outcomes. The set of indicators has been defined by government as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. CAA will include the annual publication of the comparative performance of all areas against all the measures. Some of these indicators are taken from the new national survey of public views on local services. This will replace the current three-yearly best value satisfaction surveys, and give local people more say in determining how well local services are meeting their needs.

The Commission will report performance against the national indicator set in a manner that informs citizens, people who use services and central government. Among the different factors under consideration are;

- the most appropriate comparator groups, for example, all councils of similar types, nearest neighbours;
- the most helpful way to organise how the information is presented; and
- whether any adjustment for local factors should be made, for example, deprivation.

As well as reporting performance against the national indicator set, the Commission will also use this data to inform the area risk assessment, the direction of travel assessment and the use of resources assessments.

Beyond the national indicator set the Commission will also be seeking to rely on the local management information used by local bodies and partnerships to understand the needs and performance of their areas.

It is critical that discussions about the emerging improvement architecture are underpinned by a clear understanding of what kinds of improvement are now being sought.

2.6 The Resultant Impact on Service Improvement

The aforementioned inspection and assessment regimes had one common aim, to improve performance. This section provides Central Government's own perspective and metrics in support of that performance improvement.

In regard to service delivery improvement the government has claimed that external inspection makes an important contribution (OPSR, 2003b:2). However (Byatt and Lyons, 2001) and (Boyne, 2003) claim there is no empirical evidence to support this assertion. In December 2004, the Audit Commission released the scores and analysis from CPA for 2004 and also released their proposals from 2005. In March 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and HM Treasury published their vision of a new performance framework in a document called '*Securing Better Outcomes: Developing a New Performance Framework*', which was developed in parallel with the AC consultations.

The key message in December 2003 (Audit Commission paper CPA) was that: Councils are improving across the board. Overall, 26 out of 150 single tier and county councils have improved by at least one comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) category, compared to just 9 that have reduced category. In many other cases improvement has taken place but it has not yet been sufficient for councils to increase category. Improvement has taken place across the country, and across different types of council (urban, rural, counties and unitaries).

While improvement has happened across CPA categories – excellent, good, fair, weak and poor – it has been most rapid in the bottom two categories. Over one-third – 14 out of 34 – of councils categorised as poor or weak in 2002 have moved up a category.

The 2003 report provided new CPA information for each single tier and county council based principally on reported changes in service performance during 2003. Corporate assessments of councils' ability to improve had only been carried out in those councils that could potentially move into the excellent category based on changes in their service performance.

Most of the movement in CPA had been upwards, from poor to weak, weak to fair, fair to good, and good to excellent. There was also evidence of some moves downwards. The service blocks used in CPA in 2003 are the same as in 2002. The top ten improvements in service scores were in a mix of councils, ranging from poor to excellent.

The report identified an overall increase in the number of councils in the higher CPA categories. Twenty-six councils showed an improved category and nine a lower category. In addition, there had been improvements in many other types of council that have not been sufficient to trigger a change in CPA category, but did represent improvements in services for the public.

There were a total of 26 councils in the excellent category, 56 in good, 40 in fair, 18 in weak and 10 in poor. This meant that 55 per cent of councils were at that time in the top two categories.

The performance of councils, as measured by the CPA framework, improved from 2002 to 2008:

- Seventy-two per cent of councils not already in the top category in 2002 received a relatively higher CPA score in 2008 (92 out of 127).
- Top performance was much more common in 2008, when 42 per cent of councils were in the highest CPA category compared to 15 per cent in 2002.
- Councils responded to CPA and very poor performance was tackled. By 2006, there were no councils in the lowest CPA category compared to 9 per cent in 2002.

The scores for most services improved between 2002 and 2008, contributing to higher CPA scores. In 2008, no councils scored 1 (below minimum requirements) for housing, environment, social care (adults), culture, benefits or use of resources.

Improvements in the services that local people received and the outcomes achieved were widespread across the different service areas. For example, the proportion of household waste that was recycled and the percentage of households with kerbside recycling facilities rose significantly over the period of CPA. There was an improvement in the percentage of planning applications that were dealt with within the target period, and the speed at which councils processed new benefits claims greatly improved. Overall performance in environment services, the service subject to this research, showed a slight decline in 2007 but improved significantly between 2007 and 2008. Councils that achieved top performance (scoring 4) increased from 22 (15 per cent) in 2007 to 41 (28 per cent) in 2008. Ninety-five per cent of councils performed consistently or well above the minimum requirements for environment (scoring 3 or 4) in 2008. No council performed below the minimum requirements for environment in 2008, for the third year in a row.

Forty-four councils improved their environment service score by one in 2008, but no councils improved their score by two. Only four councils received a lower environment service assessment score in 2008 than in 2007: Rutland, Thurrock, Walsall, and Wiltshire.

County councils performed particularly well in their delivery of environment services in 2008. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of county councils scored well above the minimum requirements (scoring 4) for environment in 2008, and the remainder all scored above minimum requirements. Unitary councils tended to have a lower proportion of councils achieving top performance: only 9 per cent scored 4 in 2008. Following a decline in performance in 2007, 20 London councils improved their environment service score in 2008. Ninety-one per cent of London councils achieved a score of 3 or 4 in 2008, compared to 52 per cent in 2007. All councils in the North East, North West, South West and West Midlands regions performed above or well above the minimum requirements for environment, scoring 3 or 4 in 2008.

Councils also improved the way they managed themselves. Corporate assessments showed that councils improved their performance management arrangements, leadership, capacity and the way that they worked in partnership with other organisations.

There was widespread improvement in CPA scores for single-tier and county councils between 2002 and 2008.

Of the 127 councils that could improve (those that were not already in the top category in 2002), 92 councils (72 per cent) achieved a higher CPA category in 2008 than they did in 2002.

- Some councils made substantial improvements. Twenty-seven councils improved by two or three CPA categories overall between 2002 and 2008.
- The number of top performers increased significantly over the CPA period. In 2008 42 per cent of councils were awarded 4 stars, compared to 15 per cent rated as excellent in 2002.
- Four councils, Coventry, Islington, Wakefield and Waltham Forest, improved from poor in 2002 (the lowest CPA category) to 4 star in 2008 (the highest CPA category).

Alongside CPA scores, public perception was an important barometer of local authority performance. Public perception was measured through a triennial user satisfaction survey of local people. The changes in the public's views of local authorities over the lifetime of CPA presented a complex picture.

Despite the improvements seen in CPA scores and the underlying service assessment scores, public satisfaction with local government as a whole declined. Average overall satisfaction with councils (including figures for districts) fell from 64 per cent in 2000/01 to 55 per cent in 2003/04 and further still to 53 per cent in 2006/07. However, in the same period, public satisfaction with most council services increased.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2008 represented the fourth and final year that a harder test of council performance was undertaken. This enabled year-on-year comparison, where possible, with performance in 2007, 2006 and 2005. In summary this showed that:

- More councils were improving strongly than ever before. By 2008, 35 councils (24 per cent) were improving strongly, up from 26 councils (17 per cent) in 2007.

- Eighty per cent of councils were 3 star or 4 star in 2008. London councils and county councils were most likely to perform in the top two categories, at 91 per cent and 88 per cent respectively.
- Forty-two per cent of councils (62 councils) performed at the highest level (4 star) in 2008, more than in any other year of CPA reporting. Twenty-seven councils maintained their position as 4 star councils for the fourth year running.
- For the third year running, no councils were categorised as 0 star. Only four councils were 1 star in 2008. However, this was an increase from only two councils in 2007. The four councils that were categorised as 1 star in 2008 were Doncaster, Haringey, Milton Keynes and Surrey.
- Twenty-nine councils improved their star category in 2008. This constituted 31 per cent of all councils that were not already 4 star in 2007. However, 26 councils received a lower overall CPA category in 2008 than in 2007, compared to 15 councils between 2006 and 2007.
- Councils that improved strongly in 2008 also tended to perform well overall. Twenty-six of the 35 councils that were improving strongly were 4 star councils, eight were categorised as 3 star, and one was 2 star.
- Councils continue to improve how well they are using their resources. Twenty-five councils achieved a higher overall score in 2008 than in 2007, while only nine councils received a lower score.
- Ninety-one per cent of councils performed consistently or well above the minimum requirements for use of resources in 2008. There were no councils that performed below minimum requirements (scoring 1) for use of resources in 2008.
- Seventy-eight per cent of councils performed consistently or well above the minimum requirements for value for money in 2008, an increase of six percentage points from 2007. For the second year running, no single-tier or county council performed below the minimum requirements (scoring 1) for value for money.
- Ninety-one per cent of councils with responsibility for housing performed consistently or well above minimum requirements in 2008. For the first year,

there were no councils that scored 1 (below minimum requirements) for housing.

- The number of councils that achieved top performance (scoring 4) for environment improved from 22 councils in 2007 to 41 councils in 2008. In 2008, 95 per cent of councils scored 3 or 4 for environment. For the third consecutive year, no councils were below the minimum requirements (scoring 1) for environment.
- Culture services continued to improve in 2008. Thirty-two councils (21 per cent) achieved top performance in 2008. In total, 44 councils improved their culture score between 2007 and 2008.
- Twenty-six councils achieved an overall corporate assessment score of 4. No councils performed below the minimum requirements (scoring 1) for their corporate assessment.

The period over which CPA operated coincided with increasing public concern about environmental issues. In some cases, the government set statutory targets (for example, recycling and planning) and in other areas there was a more general expectation of improvement. In practice, some councils exceeded targets set by government, particularly where these areas were also a local priority for improvement. For example, several councils achieved recycling rates of around 50 per cent or more by 2007/08, despite a highest statutory target of 30 per cent during the period.

Environment services delivery, the subject of this study, started from a low base in 2002 with over half of councils scoring 1 or 2. Almost one in seven councils (20 in total) scored 1 in 2002. Considerable progress was made from this poor starting point.

The vast majority of councils (95 per cent) were rated at least a 3 in 2008 (delivering a service that was above or well above minimum requirements).

- Seventy-three per cent of councils that could improve their environment score did so between 2002 and 2008.
- More councils performed at the highest level in 2008. Forty-one councils scored 4 for environment in 2008, an increase of 28 councils from 2002.

- There were some dramatic turnarounds in performance in this service area. Three councils (Bedfordshire, Southampton and West Berkshire) improved their environment score from 1 in 2002 to 4 in 2008.
- The poor performance seen in 2002 was addressed over time. By 2006 there were no councils scoring 1, which meant that there were no councils deemed to be delivering an environment service that was below minimum requirements.

However this picture of improvement was not universal. Ten councils received a relatively lower score in 2008 compared to 2002.

There was a steady improvement in how well councils led their communities. In 2002, many councils had a very limited understanding of their communities, and community, political and managerial leadership were variable. Staff were not always clear about strategic objectives.

Could it be that the widespread improvements claimed for CPA simply prove authorities have learned to play the box-ticking game? Why for example do North East councils appear to lead the way on ambition, whilst the South East councils trail in capacity building? Why would improvements soar across the West Midlands but not in the East Midlands? In the LGA News of March 2009 David Prince former Chief Executive of the Standards Board for England and ex head of Local Government at the Audit Commission commented that the commission acknowledges, over CPA's life, objective performance assessments moved in the opposite direction from public satisfaction with councils – currently 53%. But something real did happen. In 2002, one in five councils was in the two bottom score categories. Now, only four have one star. If games were played, 26 councils in 2008 forgot the rules and dropped categories – compared with 25 last year – almost cancelling out the 29 who rose. The two star falls in five councils, including Surrey, prove the game is real when eyes wander off the ball. Those 13 councils achieving 'excellent' or four stars every year didn't just tick boxes.

Environmental services, the focus of this study however show a varied picture. Twenty-four councils had improved their performance, but 29 have deteriorated. Environment covers three different areas – waste, transport and planning. Changes in the performance indicators available to measure environmental services have affected the comparison of scores between years. However, evidence from MORI

shows that public satisfaction with the environment has been declining in recent years. This reinforces the CPA findings that environmental services are not improving in many places.

Grace and Martin, (2008). Claim that performance and improvement in the public sector are both multidimensional. While there have been improvements in corporate capacity leadership and the quality of some services, some other aspects of performance – for example public sector productivity – have received less attention and/or shown less tangible improvement in recent years, and improvements in corporate capacity and performance indicators have not necessarily registered with the public.

There is some evidence to suggest that CPA scores have improved in part because authorities have become more adept at presenting themselves in a good light (or gaming). Local government needs to secure the trust of central government, local partners and the public, and improvements in presentation may indicate that they are now paying more attention to, and getting better at, engaging in meaningful ways with services users and citizens. Certainly there is now an improved understanding of what shapes local people's perceptions of local government's performance than there was five years ago and more attention is being paid to public satisfaction. But it is important that the improvements have real substance and are relevant to local people's needs and aspirations.

Another important consideration is that of whose improvement. To take an obvious and current example, in the environmental service delivery sector involved in this study a move to fortnightly bin collection may lead to significant improvements in meeting waste management targets and in the long term make a contribution to enhancing community wellbeing. But it is interpreted by many householders as a decline in the service, which has in turn been reflected in other important measures of performance including levels of public satisfaction in the latest BVPI User Surveys and, in some authorities, electoral success. This was evident in the Audit Commission judgements as well as the interview data collected in several of the authorities forming the primary data group.

Moreover, what matters may well change over time. An example is the introduction into the CPA to the use of resources assessment. Prior to 2005 this did not register as an element of performance in terms of the CPA framework. The Audit

Commission's proposals for CAA suggest that it will be an important part of the new framework of assessment. Equally, what is meant by resources may change over time. For example, it is unlikely that three or four years ago many authorities would have considered their carbon footprint as an indicator of their use of resources. Now this is becoming an important issue.

It is important to recognise that improvement is context specific. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and beneath the picture of overall improvements, lies a much more complex story. Rates of improvement have varied between services. Some councils have improved much faster than others. This is evident in the ten authorities forming the primary data group. Some aspects of performance have improved quite dramatically, others seem not to have shifted to the same degree. The combination of additional funding, new technology and EU landfill targets have for example combined to produce spectacular improvements in key performance indicators relating to waste management, an area of service delivery covered by this study. However there are other services where it has been much less easy to change approaches to service delivery and rates of improvement have been much slower.

2.7 Enabling Policy Legislation

Since 2001 some twenty or more Central Government White Papers have been issued in support of the LGMA. Of those some there are eleven key policies designed to have the biggest impact on service improvement; (Martin & Bovaird, 2005).

- The Beacon Council Scheme
- The Best Value regime
- Capital strategies and asset management plans
- Capacity building
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)
- Electronic Governance
- Intervention and recovery support
- Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs)

- Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)
- The National Procurement Strategy
- Powers to trade and other freedoms

These policies were supplemented by advice and guidance from the Audit Commission, the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), Communities as well as the I&DeA and were expected to lead to;

- Improvements in the culture and capacity of local authorities
- More effective local partnership working
- Better central-local relations

It was anticipated that these changes would lead to;

- Higher quality services
- More cost effective services
- Improved value for money
- More responsive services
- More joined up services
- Improved access to services for all groups
- Increased user satisfaction
- Increased staff satisfaction

Whilst retaining the confidentiality it is important to consider whether the ten sample authorities are typical of all of the District Councils in regard to service delivery improvements. The key assessments utilised have been the Audit Commission Inspections both service specific and corporate over the life of this research for each authority. In order to retain the anonymity of the sample authorities it is not possible to name the particular assessment documents. However it is necessary to consider the perceived success or otherwise of these White papers, policy documents and Inspections in order to confirm their effectiveness in delivering improvements. The ten sample authorities have all had similar access to these documents and it is assumed that they have utilised them accordingly.

CPA measured how well councils were delivering services for local people and communities. It looked at performance from a range of perspectives and combined a set of judgements to provide an easily understood rating and a more complete picture of how councils should focus activity to secure improvement. It brought together information from other inspectorates to form an overall view of the performance of councils.

The Audit Commission (2009) conclude by saying;

“Since its introduction in 2002, council services have improved significantly and CPA has been acknowledged as one of the catalysts for this”.

Obviously the volume of data are somewhat overwhelming as part of a specific piece of research. It is a sweeping statement to declare that council services have improved significantly and although the audit commission reports propose key drivers for success as well as failure there are also some questions to be asked in regard to conformity. Other drivers and variables including differing levels of productivity, deprivation, and resources have been subject to specific research. Similarly the means by which failing authorities have been ‘turned around’ have also been subject to scrutiny.

2.8 Target Driven Improvements?

Critics of the CPA regime have argued that:

Governance by targets rests on the assumption that targets can change the behaviour of individuals as well as organisations, but that ‘gaming’ can be kept to some acceptably low level, (Bevan and Hood, 2006). They suggest that ‘gaming’ can be defined as reactive subversion such as ‘hitting the target and missing the point’ or reducing performance where targets do not apply.

Some of the theoretical problems of performance metrics are well know (Boyne ,2002). The economist Charles Goodhart concluded following his analysis of the failure of the UK government’s reliance on money supply targets in the 1980s to control inflation that;

“Any obscured statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed on it for control purposes’ (Goodhard, 1984 p. 94). More pithily ‘when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a valid measure”

Any inspection regime can be considered to be subject to 'Goodhart's Law', which in essence proposes that when a measure becomes a target it ceases to be a good measure.

A fervent critic of the value of targets (Seddon J, 2008) argues that there is no value in having a target, since it is an arbitrary number; by its nature it will drive sub-optimisation (distortion) into a system, allowing parts to 'win' at the expense of the whole.

Hambleton et al, (2009) propose that whilst ticking the correct boxes may satisfy the inspectors it could mask the actual decline in the quality of local services. A consequence of the limits of top-down targets is a growth of interest in public service innovation as opposed to improvement. The overlapping concepts of improvement and innovation are discussed by Argyris, (1978). Improvement being a single loop learning process where the focus of interest is on how best to achieve defined goals, the central theme in a performance target approach. This form of learning involves the detection and correction of error in ways that generally do not require changes to underlying norms, policies and objectives. However according to Argyris, (1978) innovation requires double loop learning where when an error is detected it is corrected in ways that involve a modification to underlying norms, policies and objectives. In other words the organisation will encounter challenges that cannot be dealt with by simply doing more of the same. It must innovate to correct the error.

According to Coulson (2009) difficulties will inevitably arise for any government that tries to manage the performance of decentralised agencies through systems of indicators and targets.

For a summary on how the UK Government reached its present position and what it hopes to achieve from the latest version of management by targets see Brand (2008)

2.9 External drivers influencing Improvement.

During the life of these LGMA policies many of the failing authorities have been 'turned around' The Advanced Institute of Management (AIM) looked at why some public sector organisations - schools, hospitals, local authorities etc. - were deemed to have failed and whether the traditional solutions applied to businesses were

appropriate. AIM Research Fellow Professor George Boyne found that 'luck', and how the organisations were seen by outsiders, played a significant role in public sector 'turnaround'. His research suggested that; Boyne, (2009)

- The main private sector solutions to failure were to undertake programmes of retrenchment (cutting staff and closing plants), repositioning (re-branding and finding new markets) and reorganisation (especially bringing in new top executives).
- Private sector 'turnaround' models rest on two assumptions - that recovery can be delivered by the actions of management and that the success of these actions is measured by the results that are achieved.
- Neither of these assumptions is appropriate when analysing turnaround in the public sector - failure and success may be caused by circumstances beyond the control of managers, and may be judged on the basis of whether organizations follow fashionable managerial theories and procedures.

He proposed two models of public service turnaround

The 'luck' model challenges the assumption that failing organisations are masters of their own destiny. Instead it attributes a large part of organisational performance to 'luck' - changes in external circumstances that are beyond the control of the organisation.

And successful turnaround can also be due to 'luck' - changes in the external environment, such as increases in government funding, over which the organisation has no direct control.

The other model - the 'legitimacy' model - challenges the assumption that failing organisations are simply poor performers; instead it suggests that they lack formal legitimacy. In other words, success or failure rests largely on whether organisations are seen to have adopted the 'right' managerial structures and processes, as judged by powerful external stakeholders such as UK government inspectors.

An analysis of UK local authorities' performance showed that failure was attributable to both 'misfortune' (especially economic deprivation and very diverse demands being made on the services) and 'mismanagement' (weak leadership and poor management).

The most effective turnaround strategy was reorganisation - especially the appointment of a new chief executive from inside the organisation - and the recruitment of better 'front-line' staff.

And an investigation into the role of 'legitimacy' in turnaround suggested that government inspectors were more likely to judge organisations as having recovered from failure if they were 'seen' to have modernised, irrespective of whether or not their service performance had actually improved.

'Objective' measures of local government services say that performance is improving, yet citizen satisfaction is not rising at the same rate. Why the disparity? Are citizens simply impossible to satisfy, or is something more complex at work?

A recent study undertaken in collaboration with the ESRC project '*Public Services: Exit and Voice as a means of Enhancing Service Delivery*' explored what bearing prior expectations have on citizens' satisfaction both with overall council services and household refuse collection. This is one of the services specific to this research. The study used data from online surveys of more than 3,000 individuals in England.

It also examined some of the likely influences on expectations of the quality of services, and of service improvement over the following year.

Key findings of that research proposed an 'expectation disconfirmation'.

Satisfaction is significantly affected by the difference between what people expect from a service and their perceptions of what it delivers - the theory of 'expectation disconfirmation' - with disappointed people less likely to be satisfied. People with generally high expectations of both their waste collection service and their council overall were also more likely to be dissatisfied. (James, 2006)

Areas home to a large number of people with high expectations risk scoring relatively poorly in satisfaction surveys. Local authorities should be cautious in their interpretation of such data, as surveys are likely to reflect citizen expectations as well as their perceptions of service quality.

Policy makers should also note the distinction between perceived performance and 'objective' performance as assessed by auditors, and note that it is perceived performance that counts when it comes to satisfaction.

Good current performance seems to indicate to residents a local authority's capacity to improve, making them more likely to expect positive change in the future. But perceived performance does not tend to influence expectations in the here and now - high expectations do not reflect high performance, but neither are they abandoned in the face of poor service.

Contact with services impacts on people's expectations, in that those who use council services infrequently are less likely to have high expectations overall.

Further effects are wrought by age, gender and ethnicity. Older people and women tend to expect more from their authorities - people from ethnic minority communities less so.

Residents who feel they are kept well informed by their local authority tend to have higher expectations of service quality, which could make life more difficult for local authorities by lowering the likelihood of satisfaction.

James, (2006) concluded that councils can benefit from understanding the interaction between citizen expectations, their level of satisfaction, and official and subjective assessments of performance. If questions about expectations were included in satisfaction surveys, then the relationship between expectation and satisfaction could be built into results. This would help local authorities to understand what local people expect from them and why they are (or are not) perceived to be delivering.

With the UK government placing increasing weight on performance assessment of local public bodies as a policy tool, with devolved administrations placing some - although less - weight on it. In England, comprehensive performance assessments (CPA) were key to the policy of 'earned autonomy', which linked some freedoms and flexibilities with a certain level of assessed performance.

Smart inspectees like to live in smart places - there is reason to expect public bodies in rich places to perform better than public bodies in poor places, and that granting autonomy on this basis introduces inequity.

Rewarding good inspectees with the promise of 'lighter touch' inspection is problematic in that it acknowledges inspection as unpleasant and onerous, and diverts attention from service delivery in authorities requiring the least distraction.

Research recently undertaken using a family of regression models, as well as 17 semi-structured interviews with auditors, auditees and other CPA stakeholders in England, the 'Welsh Programme for Improvement' and the 'Best Value Audits' in Scotland argued that if CPA scores were systematically related to deprivation, there would be a policy problem. With previous studies inconclusive, researchers sought to test the criticisms voiced above, and to establish whether CPA scores are a reliable and/or valid measure of the relative performance of public services. (McLean, 2009).

The research concluded that;

- Deprivation is systematically correlated with CPA scores, with more deprived areas scoring lower.
- When models for each class of authority and for each sub-domain of CPA scores are constructed, some variables become significant that are not significant when all authorities, and all CPA domains, are considered together.
- The same variable sometimes has opposite effects in different classes of authority, showing that there are interaction effects.
- In some models, Liberal Democrat-controlled councils perform worse than Conservative- or Labour-controlled councils.
- Authorities' self-assessed 'ability to improve' bears no relation to their measured improvement either one or two years later.
- One variable - school results - is a component of both the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and CPA scores, with perverse policy implications.
- Some authorities score highly in CPA despite spending less than the government assessment of their spending need, whilst others score poorly despite spending substantially more than this.

The most important finding of the study was described as a 'vicious triangle' between IMD scores, CPA scores and the funding regime for central government

grants to English local authorities. A high CPA score qualifies an authority for greater earned autonomy, and possibly for cheaper capital. Poor school grades increase an authority's IMD, which attracts extra resources but depresses its CPA score. Good grades improve an authority's CPA scores, but lower its IMD - thus reducing its resources.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Central Government Context

In the foreword to Engaging for success: enhancing performance through employee engagement July 2009 The Rt Hon Lord Mandelson Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills is quoted thus;

“This report sets out what Government can do to help promote an understanding of just how much greater employee engagement can help improve **innovation**, performance and productivity across the economy. It launches a challenge that my department will take forward in the months ahead.”

As part of its drive for modernisation, Central Government continues in its quest for improved service delivery and improving performance. To achieve such goals drivers are in place to encourage inspired thinking and openness to new ideas that leads to a radical redesign and delivery of public services. This is commonly termed innovation.

The White Paper “Innovation Nation”, published in 2008 set out the Government’s aim to make the UK the best place in the world to run an innovative business or Public Service (Peterson, 2009). The paper proposes that innovation is essential to the UK’s future prosperity and that the power of Governments spending must be harnessed to create demand for new innovative products and services. The Rt Hon John Denham MP Secretary of State for Innovation Universities and Skills is quoted as follows in the foreword and in the main body of the White Paper;

“We want innovation to flourish across every area of the economy We must innovate in our public services too”

“The expectations of public service users are rising. Customers rightly expect an ever-higher quality of public services that are more personalised and responsive to their needs. Those responsible for public service delivery must learn the lessons of open innovation and adopt innovative solutions”.

*“Successful innovation will require cultural and organisational change. Challenges do not respect traditional Departmental, service and sectoral boundaries and so new partnerships are necessary to generate and realise innovative approaches. There is an increasing recognition that the **empowerment** and incentivisation of front line workers and end users will be pivotal to achieving this”.*

Prior to the 2008 White paper Sir David Varney's report *Service Transformation* (2006) perceived the need for innovation was also on central governments agenda.

"A better deal for citizens will require innovation across the board with self directed services that will give users much greater control in shaping services to their needs" (Varney, 2006).

Innovation has been defined in simple terms by Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR) as openness to new ideas, or "the successful exploitation of new ideas". In a local government context (Peterson, 2009), argues that many of the key challenges facing public services particularly the drive for greater efficiencies, require councils and their partners to develop new approaches to delivering public services. The Government is supporting a growing body of research however at present there is no general approach for supporting radical innovation systematically across local government. There is a National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) which explicitly commits local government to building the capacity, effectiveness and reach of local government innovation, and to producing a single integrated approach to supporting innovation and excellence in local government. The I&DeA is also part of a national innovation programme for improving public service delivery seeking to 'spread and promote successful innovation throughout local government'. Peterson summarises by saying that innovation in a public sector environment carries some risks. Due to the relatively rigid and hierarchical structures within public sector organisations and the rules-based environment staff are not naturally geared up to openness and new ideas. For those reasons Peterson suggests that extra steps are needed to foster a culture of innovation through managerial leadership alongside a willingness to invest some time and capacity and avoidance of a blame culture when and if innovative approaches do not succeed. He concludes by proposing that leadership and ability to see where exploitation of new ideas can make a real difference and where investment in innovation and experimentation could bring significant long-term gains.

Over the last ten years there has been a strong political and policy emphasis on improving public services in the UK (Benington, 2007). The UK Cabinet Office (2006) report, The UK Government's approach to public sector reform, noted that:

“The Government has a clear vision: everyone should have access to public services that are efficient, effective, excellent, equitable, empowering and constantly improving” (p6).

Best practice authorities or Beacon Councils as they are often referred to have been the subject of many central government initiatives including innovation, improvement and excellence. The Beacon Council Scheme launched in 1999 (renamed The Beacon Scheme in 2005) was established to help raise standards of public services. Introduced initially in central government’s White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* with the aim that

“Beacon councils – the very best performing councils – will set the pace of change and encourage the rest to innovate and to modernise” (DETR, 1998:41)

The Beacon scheme was subjected to detailed evaluation over its lifetime with a final summary report issued by Communities and local government in March 2008. The report looked at many aspects including the link between innovation and improvement proposing a strong link between the people side of improvement, including leadership and staff engagement. Throughout the majority of Beacon Councils there was evidence of increased external recognition of improvement in service delivery, increased confidence in being innovative and an increase in the introduction of innovative ideas and practices, Radnor (2007).

In regard to leadership the report states that although this has been widely asserted as significant for public service improvement the evidence on the ground is not strong enough to support that contention. It supports this proposal by suggesting that the term is used in an undifferentiated way to mean anyone in a senior position. This undifferentiated concept of leadership assumes that all leaders are the same and will all act in the same way. A “one best way” approach to leadership similar to a “best way” approach to service delivery proposed by Ritzer, (1993). However detailed leadership research would suggest that leadership is always affected by context and therefore there will be differences according to roles. Morrell & Hartley, (2006).

Benington and Hartley, (2009) propose that more effective leadership across the whole public service system is increasingly seen as one of the most powerful ways of improving efficiency, performance and productivity across the whole public

sector, claiming it is imperative that innovative programmes are developed which can measurably improve leadership skills.

However despite these debates Hambleton et al, (2009) propose that whilst the topic of public service innovation is now receiving renewed attention in public policy circles there has been relatively little exploration of the links between leadership and innovation.

In considering the varied relationship between leadership improvement and innovation Hartley, (2005) argues that improvement and innovation are both complex and multi-faceted. Strategic leaders have a different agenda to operational leaders which has implications for innovation policies. For example the need to stimulate innovation may need to be shaped less around political and managerial perspectives and more around corporate and service related issues.

The Beacon Council evaluation report also considered the views of front line staff in regard to leadership and concluded that leadership does appear to be related to a committed and positive workplace and service attitudes. This supports the views of Cummings and Worsley, (2001) who suggest that organisational change is most successful where the commitment of staff is clear and that the kind of services provided by local government, which require close working with the public and which often require co-production makes commitment particularly important. The role of front line staff as being a key source of innovation and improvement in service processes and the quality of those services and processes has been recognised as having national policy relevance (Borins,1998; Hartley, 2005,2006a) Front line staff with a higher level of engagement reported;

- Personal innovation (personally introduces new methods and procedures at their authority).
- Innovation (believed that their service was continuously searching for new ideas).
- Improvement (service is quick to respond when change is necessary).
- Participation (formal opportunities for staff to express their ideas and opinions).

Behind central government's drive for innovation is an assumption that in all cases it will contribute to improvement. The policy has assumed a link between best practice and innovation and that innovation inevitably leads to high performance. However research undertaken by Utterback, (1996) indicates that radical innovation most usually occurs amongst those companies which are not market leaders or market shapers. Research analysed for the Beacon Scheme showed also that other pressures on a local authority such as budget crisis, threat of externalisation or new leadership were the triggers for innovation. The Beacon Scheme evaluation report concludes by saying that innovation and improvement are conceptually distinct and offer valuable insights when kept distinct rather than being blurred into one linked phrase and furthermore that innovation may not necessarily lead to improvement or to only short-run improvements so it is useful to consider possible relationships between innovation and improvement.

On 26 March 2009, the National Audit Office (NAO) published a report *Innovation across central government* which argued that, as government faces increasing pressure to do more with fewer financial resources, as well as confront challenges such as climate change and an ageing population, it would need to make the most of opportunities to improve the delivery of public services. The report found that departments were still not maximising opportunities to innovate and suggested that there were often barriers which prevented public servants from developing innovations through to implementation. Most cases of innovation seen by the NAO originated with senior management. The report suggested that there was the potential to encourage greater innovation from front line staff and service users.

It acknowledged that at the front line, public servants could be reluctant to put forward ideas where they may not appreciate how innovation related to the goals of the organisation. Other barriers to innovation encountered by public servants included risk averse attitudes within departments and a concentration on targets, budgets and high profile national initiatives.

Estimates by the NAO suggest that departments have allocated at least £3 billion in the form of innovation budgets and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) has announced a further £2.5 billion to be spent encouraging and supporting innovation from 2008/9 to 2010/11.

The report emphasised that projects supported by departmental innovation budgets should have measures in place to ensure their benefits are being realised.

Accordingly, it set out survey work which could be used to develop measures of a department's innovative capacity and to determine how effectively any money is being spent.

The report concluded by urging departments to develop detailed strategies to promote and develop innovation.

3.2 The Value of Innovation

Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell (2009) says the 'innovation across central government' report reaffirms his view that there are some

“very talented entrepreneurs” in the public sector, truly innovative in their policy making and coming up with good ideas for better services”.

The challenge for government, he acknowledges, is how to get better at nurturing such innovation, spreading success and helping departments “look over the fence” to learn from and share with others.

Sir Michael Bichard, Director of the Institute for Government (2009) says;

“We are going to have to look at fundamentally different ways of delivering services. Rhetoric about engaging with the frontline still outstrips the reality”

He points out that only 60 per cent of government organisations operate a staff suggestions scheme, “the most basic level of engagement”. The freedom to come up with ideas and not be knocked back. The big problem that people report is that, in reality, when they come up with ideas they are not always welcome. He proposes that Innovative Leaders

- Revisit structures – avoid ‘vertical’ hierarchies
- Connect with the frontline – the best ideas are near the action

Innovation is described as “doing something nobody told you to do” (Hambleton, 2009)

In order to put in place the building blocks for improvement Dr Michael Harris,(2009) research director at the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

(NESTA), says fundamental reform of public sector structures is needed to achieve a real transformation in public services.

“If we still have departments that are organised along bureaucratic lines and traditional responsibilities they are going to default to responding to traditional agendas,”

“We need to free up and incentivise public sector workers and we are only going to be able to do that if we give them much more autonomy and control over what they do.”

“They need to feel they own the services that they are delivering. We do need a fundamental shift away from central targets and administration to frontline workers designing and delivering services as they see fit.”

“That would then free central government to play a more strategic role, once you remove it from day to day target setting and management of services.”

The role for the centre, he suggests, is to flag up the big challenges that public services will have to respond to.

Local authorities will have to work in new ways to achieve continual improvement and to fulfil their new place shaping role. With councils under ever increasing pressure to improve performance they need to engage in new ways of working.

The importance of innovation continues to be high on the political agenda and is ever more being linked to leadership and engaged employees as the three ingredients necessary as a means of improving performance in the public sector.

In a recent report August 2009 entitled *Whole systems go! Improving leadership across the whole public service system* published by the National School of Government and the Public Service System Bennington and Hartley addressed the question

“What would it take to create more effective leadership of the whole government and public service system?”

They put forward seven propositions for radical change in leadership development including a need to strengthen leadership skills and capabilities requiring radical innovations.

Writing in the September 2009 edition of *Public Servant* Sir Gus O'Donnell Cabinet Secretary stressed the importance of

“unlocking the creativity and energy of staff, We must ensure we capture the knowledge and experience of frontline staff. Nobody knows about what works and what doesn't better than the people delivering the services themselves, and it is vital that Whitehall policymakers reflect that knowledge when designing government policies”.

In the same publication Tina Ellicot Assistant Manager of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) declared that

“The consensus is clear – innovation is needed to meet the challenges of the 21st Century and public services are being urged to learn from the frontline and harness the bright ideas of their staff. We all have bright ideas and the people delivering services often come up with some of the most innovative improvements”.

In exploring how important the idea of employee engagement was, and what benefits it could offer companies, organisations and employees a link between engagement and performance was established and presented to central government as part of the MacLeod Review (2008). In a speech to the Public Service Event Enterprise, Skills and Innovation Conference on 24 September 2009 Nita Clarke, Director of Involvement and Participation Association referred to this report and as well as making specific reference to the value of innovation also considered what workplace relationships were needed to persuade employees to share their best ideas with their colleagues and managers.

This view is supported by (Birkinshaw 2009) of the London Business School who proposes that

“Employee engagement is the sine qua non on innovation...you cannot foster true innovation without engaged employees”

The 2008 MacLeod review was followed by a report published by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills in July 2009 entitled *Engaging for Success*. The report foreword from the Rt Hon Lord Mandelson, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills proposes that;

“only organisations that truly engage and inspire their employees produce world class levels of innovation, productivity and performance.....there has

never been a more important time to think about employee engagement in Britain.....It sets out what government can do to help promote an understanding of just how much greater employee engagement can help improve innovation, performance and productivity across the economy.”

In commenting on this same report in the September 2009 edition of Professional Manager Ruth Spellman Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Chief Executive declared that

“For a high quality of working life and a high quality of performance, it doesn’t matter so much what the business is, but how the people in that business behave. Right now, organisations across the UK are hampered by poor management skills, with leaders who have an inability to ‘let go’ and allow staff to take ownership of their work”.

The Audit Commission in a recent paper entitled *Seeing the Light* (2007) suggest innovation is one driver of such demands. Although public sector organisations have a history of innovating (Mulgan and Albury, 2003) it has not been the focus of any detailed research until the 2007 paper.

Innovation is increasingly being used in the language of governments and public service organisations often without an explanation of what is meant by the term. In that sense, innovation may be fashionable rhetoric rather than an analytical term. Hartley, (2009).

Albary, (2005) notes ‘innovation occurs ever more frequently in rhetoric and discourses of public service improvement.

Innovation is seen by policy analysts as a key means to go beyond accepted quality improvement techniques applied to service into something that could make a substantial improvement in the overall efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of government and public service organisations. Some analysts focus on innovation as a contribution to improving the quality of services Moore and Hartley, (2008).

Walker and Damanpour, (2009) propose that innovation is being increasingly used as a route to higher levels of organisational performance in public agencies. For the majority of local government organisations changes in governance, new management processes, target setting and benchmarking are novel and hence, their introduction is considered by some as adopting innovations. Following the exploration of the impact of two types of innovation on two measures of

organisational performance in English local government Walker and Damanpour, (2009) conclude that although the results generally support the notion that innovation has a positive effect on organisational performance the evidence base for arguments about the impact of innovation on organisational performance and differential effects of type of innovation on the innovation-performance relationship is limited.

In collaboration with the ESRC, AIM are continuing with research into leadership and innovation by considering what managers can do in order to sustain innovation.

The rationale being that in debates on productivity and performance, innovation figures prominently as a source of competitive advantage in terms of new strategies, markets, products, processes and ways of working.

Innovation in a public sector service delivery context is defined as the process by which organisations develop new products, services or ways of doing things. Hartley, (2006) Therefore an approach to improvement with three defining features;

- Novelty – innovation introduces something new to the organisation, marking a break from its established practices.
- Influence on change – innovation results in an identifiable step change in the behaviour of the organisation.
- The goal of improvement – organisations innovate in order to deliver a performance improvement or increased value for money.

Authorities can innovate across the range of services and activities;

- Service design or delivery innovation – providing a new service to users, or delivering existing services in a new way.
- Process or managerial innovation – changing the processes, managerial structure, or organisational structure of an authority's back office or service delivery functions.

The report suggests that in order for this to take effect the importance of organisational culture and one of the influential factors considered is that of **Empowering Staff**. Writers such as Beirne, (2006) suggest changes in organisational culture and power status must be considered. In particular, authors

including Foy, (1994) Yates, (2001) Collins, (1994) cite a culture of employee empowerment to be essential.

Borins,(2001) suggests that corporate ambition and flatter structures do not in themselves lead to innovation. What is needed is a bright idea. Front line operational staff are often best placed to identify when something can be done differently and better. Borins, (2001) found that half of all innovations originated from front line staff and middle managers. Generating innovation is often down to the quality of individuals and the extent to which they can flourish in a supportive culture. Being receptive to suggestions for new ways of working and having in place the vehicles to bring those ideas to the surface is a key factor in enabling innovation. Adopting an open mind and having in place a process that supports well thought through risk taking and experimentation will encourage innovation, (Public Audit Forum 1999). However as in all new approaches even with a risk taking culture central government accept that not all will deliver results (Lyons 2007). High numbers of staff claim they have the opportunity to raise ideas and to contribute to the process either through project teams or working groups. However, of the corporate assessments of single tier and county councils conducted since December 2005 only a third cited evidence that staff are encouraged to be flexible and innovative in meeting service needs. This suggests that there is still more scope for authorities to engage with their staff to generate ideas for new ways of working.

The paper argues that cross-cutting structures encourage innovation, as does devolving responsibility to customer-facing staff working in a culture that combines ambition and openness to new ideas that encourage innovation. Recent Comprehensive Performance Assessments identify innovation in almost 75% of single tiers authorities with over 50% reporting that they are involved in a great deal of innovation. This finding compares favourably to a study published in 2000 where 67% of respondents claimed to have undertaken innovation in the previous two years and 88% predicted a similar approach in the next 12 months Newman *et al* (2000). Case studies however show that innovation is more often used to address poor performance than in service areas of relative strength.

The paper suggests that local authorities should;

- Consider routinely the role that innovation has to play in service improvement, and be willing to countenance innovative approaches where incremental improvement may not deliver the results required.
- Encourage staff across all service and support areas to consider innovative ways to improve performance.
- Review organisational structures to ensure that departmental silos and hierarchies do not inhibit the generation or spread of innovative ideas.

In commenting on the analysis of an e-mail questionnaire undertaken by the Chartered Management Institute in November 2005 the Director of marketing and corporate affairs stated that “if morale, performance and productivity are to be improved organisations need to create a culture where decisions can be reached based on empowerment and entrepreneurial spirit”. (www.managers.org.uk)

Service Improvement therefore requires innovation and recent research into how organisations can raise its innovation game has concluded that high performance innovative organisations required, amongst other things, ‘inspirational leaders’ (Munshi *et al*, 2005).

Thus the research suggests that there is a direct link between leadership and innovation.

Current research being undertaken by the Advanced Institute for Management Research (AIM) looks in detail at the impact of leadership on innovation. Key findings of the report consider the dual role of leadership. Firstly leaders are motivators. (Munshi *et al*, 2005). They inspire people to transcend the ordinary, and to innovate. Secondly they are architects in an administrative sense designing an organisational environment that enables employees to be innovative. (Borins, 2001) suggests that it is important to recognise, too that when we think about leadership and innovation, leadership is not restricted to those at the very top of an organisation. Leaders are important at all levels in an organisation. Innovation itself can be considered as having two dimensions. Firstly the thing being innovated be that the service or product or process. And secondly the degree of novelty involved. This can range from a small incremental change to the way a public service is delivered to a complete overhaul of that service process. Leaders need to be able to affect innovation through their use of “innovation enablers” such as leadership

systems, organisation design, competencies and networks. In summary the impact of leadership on innovation goes well beyond the motivating effect of an inspirational or charismatic leader. Leaders can affect innovation through organisational design and must create appropriate organisational environments to suit the different innovation processes.

Quinn, Anderson and Finkelstein, (2008) propose that highly motivated, innovative and creative groups often outperform groups with greater physical or financial resources. They suggest that organisations without these attributes may fail to adapt aggressively to changing external conditions and more particularly to innovations that obsolesce their earlier skills.

Innovation and creativity within an organisation can be evident in two distinct ways. There are differences in organisations with highly creative people, those with an 'innovative style' being stimulated and responding by presenting more radical ideas and problem solutions than before and those who adopt a more accepted adaptive style of problem solving. Ekvall, (2009) argues that there will be a conflict between innovative and adaptive problem solvers who will be uneasy and lose energy and motivation to solve problems. The dilemma of having 'innovators' and 'adaptors' in the same organisation understanding and accepting each others ways of approaching and solving problems and working together is discussed by Kirton, (1987).

The rationale behind this research is a view that delivering better public services is perhaps the key focus of domestic policy debate. Contributions from U.K. research on management can and should make an important contribution to identification and exploitation of opportunities for increased productivity and enhanced performance - while at the same time identifying issues that must be addressed in further research.

If it is generally accepted that front line operational staff are often best placed to identify when something can be done differently and better and also that over half of all innovations originate from front line staff and middle managers then a strategy of empowering and enabling those front line staff as well as having inspirational leaders rather than managers is one to be adopted. As discussed generating innovation is often down to the quality of leaders and individuals and the extent to which they can be empowered and encouraged to flourish. The following sections

deal with the concept of Empowerment by connecting with the front line and the impact of Leadership on performance improvement.

3.3 Examination of the Concept of Empowerment

John Tschohl, (1998) President of the Service Quality Institute in America defines empowerment as a condition where any employee can do whatever he or she has to do on the spot to take care of a customer to the customer's satisfaction - not to the company's satisfaction. Bowen and Lawler, (1991) suggest that empowerment is defined as "management strategies for sharing decision making power", whereas Barbee and Bott, (1991) define empowerment as being "the act of vesting substantial responsibility in the people nearest the problem".

Van Oudtshoorn and Thomas, (1993) suggest that empowered employees feel a sense of personal worth with the ability to affect outcomes and having the power to make a difference.

The notion that organisations would gain competitive advantage if they had a policy of employee involvement was promoted in the 1980's by influential popular management writers, for example;

"Involve everyone in everything, leading by empowering people" Peters, (1989)

"We want take charge employees". Schonberger,(1990)

Wilkinson, (1997) suggests that the best selling book *In search of Excellence*, Peters and Waterman, (1982) was influential in laying the foundations for the empowerment movement.

A central message was the need to move away from the rationalist accountancy models to a more intuitive style of management. Peters, (1982) encouraged managers to involve and trust employees.

This coincided with the globalisation of competition and the identification of a customer who was becoming more demanding in terms of choice, quality and levels of service. Private sector organisations began to respond swiftly to customer demands.

With the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in 1988 the public sector was now no longer immune to these commercial pressures. As a result of these pressures both public and private sector organisations saw a change of emphasis from economy of scale to a more flexible, innovative and responsive means of supplying goods and services.

According to Piore and Sabel, (1983) empowerment would not only increase job satisfaction but also contribute to the organisational need to customise products and services with a flexible specification.

What exactly the term 'empowerment' means, how it can be achieved, and what its actual consequences are, not only for the recipients of but also the providers of services, have all been hotly contested (Hardy and Leiba-Osullivan, 1998; Lincoln et al 2002. Parker and Slaughter, 1988, Potterfield, 1999).

In terms of definitions, empowerment has been conceptualised as an act, whereby decision-making authority is delegated downward; a process, whereby the organisational environment is changed so that employees experience more power and a psychological state (Menon, 2001). Four cognitions have been associated with that state a sense of self-determination, or having control over one's own actions, a sense of competence, or confidence in one's own ability to perform, a sense of impact, or the ability to influence outcomes at work of a strategic administrative or operational nature, and a sense of meaningfulness, or fit between one's own values and beliefs and the requirements of the work role (Bowen and Lawler, 1995, Conger and Kanungo 1988, Spreitzer, 1995). When any one of these cognitions is threatened, perceptions of empowerment will be reduced, and possibly eliminated (Seiber et al, 2004).

Management, no matter how expert, cannot set out in advance exactly what must be done under all circumstances and how, but must rely to some extent on the workers' co-operation, initiative and experience (MacInnes 1987 p.130).

One way to critique the involvement philosophies popularised by management writers and those concerned with empowerment, therefore, is to attack the rhetoric of involvement and participation and from this, examine the respective roles of managers and workers. What is often termed participation, with connotations of extensive involvement and representation, most often equates only with some highly restricted form of involvement. (Ramsey and Berne, 1988)

In many ways participation and empowerment are natural corollaries. (Pateman, 1970). For example, discussing participation, notes that effective grass-roots participation in political structures, requires a feeling of political efficacy on the part of those involved. In short, effective participation requires a feeling of empowerment and vice versa.

Varying degrees of empowerment have been hypothesized, with employee suggestion programs at one end of the continuum and recognition of employees as full partners in the organisational enterprise at the other (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). This raises the question of at what point should an initiative be labelled empowering. For example, allowing employees input into decision-making is not the same as allowing employees to make decisions themselves. The term 'empowerment' does imply power-sharing (Colins, 1999, McArdle et al, 1995), but some say empowerment is an illusion because managers have no intention of sharing power with their employees. Collins, for example, argues that empowerment is an ideological construct that obscures the essential conflict of interest at the heart of the employment relationship, making employees mistakenly feel that their interests are aligned with those of the organisation.

Although empowerment is one of the central practices associated with creating high commitment workplaces, it is evident that commitment can be secured both through coercion and through incentive (Foley, 2006). Most of the empowerment literature seems to assume that the latter approach is the norm, so that employees will have real opportunities for meaningful input, and will benefit financially and psychologically from the additional information to which they will be privy, and from the additional autonomy they will be given.

Empowerment has been called the 'controlled' transfer of power from management to employee in the long-term transfer of the business as a whole' (Barry, 1992)

(Carlson, 1993) suggests that the purpose of empowerment is to free someone from vigorous control by instructions and orders and give the freedom to take responsibility for their ideas and actions, and release hidden resources which would otherwise remain inaccessible',

Empowerment is 'about imbuing staff with sufficient self-confidence and skills that they are able to exercise their discretion – individually or jointly – and resolve issues

which would otherwise have been referred elsewhere for a decision.....It is more than delegation, it is about emancipating staff and revolutionising their attitudes towards work' (Osbaldeston, 1993)

Managers who empower their staff not only trust them to achieve results but positively want them to achieve those results in new ways – even to the extent of encouraging their staff to question the whole process and dramatically improve it or eliminate it altogether. Empowerment implies a new attitude towards honest mistakes. Rather than being a reason for blame, honest mistakes can become valuable learning opportunities.

Empowerment's roots can be traced to Frederick Herzberg's research over thirty years ago, which brought out the mismatch between 'motivations' and 'hygiene factors'. His work emphasised the intrinsic factors, the motivators, such as responsibility, achievement, the work itself, in achieving what is now called empowerment. Once a person really feels able to determine the content and pace of his or her own work, then he or she is genuinely empowered. The extrinsic factors such as working conditions and pay are only of secondary importance. (Herzberg, 1959)

Much more recently Charles Handy referred to empowerment by clarifying the two boundaries of every job. The inner boundary defines the job's essential core, the roles and responsibilities and the outer boundary defines the limits of discretion. Between them lies the scope for initiative and for personal responsibility. The wider the outer boundary, the greater the degree of empowerment. (Handy, 1994)

Davenport & Balcombe, (1994) argue that these definitions of empowerment apply equally to the public, as well as the private sector.

Empowerment has also been defined as giving someone power or authority. That could mean allowing front line support providers the ability to make decisions that are exceptions to the rules like offering something to the customer that would not be normal, perhaps a concession if they have had a bad experience. By allowing front line support providers to make some exceptions, it saves valuable time for the customer and the company. It relieves the supervisor from having to be instantly available for decision making, it creates goodwill and customer satisfaction, and it allows the support provider to have some ownership in decisions. When customers

realise that the support provider must continuously ask permission, the customer often bypasses the support person.

If we define empowerment as giving someone power and authority then it might be easy to see why many employees do not believe they are empowered. When employees have to get permission for minor decisions, they are not empowered. If they then get reprimanded for making “the wrong” decisions in the eyes of their line manager then they are sure they are not empowered.

It is important to approach corrective action as a learning process and allow the employee to feel confident and assured that he/she is still doing the right thing. It is very easy to discourage an employee with negative feedback. More than likely, an employee can self evaluate a situation and determine what went wrong and what to do next time.

It seems there is little understanding about how one becomes empowered. In order for any employee to be empowered, they must be trained. Often supervisors are able to make decisions that their subordinates can't. They know more options, limits, or have experience that helps them make good decisions for the company and the customer. They have been trained. That same training can easily be delivered to the frontline employees so they can make better decisions, quickly and accurately.

According to Biohowiak, (2008) empowered employees exercise their freedom to act within their area of competence in order to satisfy customer needs. They take responsibility, accept accountability, exercise initiative, and deliver results.”

He proposes three tests to indicate the actual presence of Empowerment:

1. Do people act? Empowerment is meaningless if no one does anything with it.
2. Do they act without reservation? Hesitation in a time-critical environment is like not taking action.
3. Do they do the “right thing” – meaning that they take actions that support the organisation’s mission and values – instinctively and instantly?

He suggests that an environment of empowerment can be created in any organisation using just five critical elements, detailed below.

- 1 Describe expected outcomes. Most job descriptions detail tasks. That is wholly insufficient. Define people's roles in terms of what happens when their job is done well. That is far more powerful and freeing than detailing chores.
- 2 Define authority limits. If people are "empowered" but don't know the extent of their authority, they may do two equally awful things:
They assume way too much authority and unwittingly overstep the line of reason (or at least your impression of it); or,
They assume no authority for fear of crossing the undefined line.
- 3 Institute accountability. That means holding people to account for what they do. In simple terms, it means explaining to people that you reserve the right to ask a simple question: "Why did you do that?" Asking such a question does not imply a threat of punishment or job loss. It does mean you expect people to act thoughtfully responsibly and to be ready to give an account of their actions.
- 4 Provide support. Leaders who expect their charges to produce great work with enthusiasm need to provide two types of support. Operational support – adequate information, enabling processes, and tools fit to do the job; and, Personal support – being available to assist, and to provide encouragement and back-up when things don't go according to plan.
- 5 Compensate good work with rewards. Amply distribute both forms of compensation: fiscal and psychic paychecks. Tie compensation to both methods and results. Remember that psychic rewards have more behaviour-shaping value than most fiscal ones.

Finally, if you truly want empowered people around you, be overt about it. "Enlightened leaders loudly and proudly declare the confidence they have in their trusted and empowered followers."

Private sector motor manufacturers pioneered new ways of involving staff and improving efficiency in the process. Defined as lean management technique its usefulness as a tool for the public sector has been the subject of recent pilots. (Bawden 2008) commented that it is a philosophy of organisational life, about changing culture by allowing people at all levels of the organisation to contribute, with staff positively encouraged to flag up problems and proffer solutions. It requires a loosening of control from the top and has to be seen as long term. Problems arise however within the political structures of the public sector where budgets are cut every year and quantifiable results are demanded within a 12 month timeframe.

She suggests that for lean techniques to actually empower public sector workers it requires the centre to cede control and not micro-manage. For example in the recent floods a Chief Executive demanded all requests for sandbags be put through to him until he was overwhelmed with requests. It is about showing staff they can find a way to change processes themselves. It is about unleashing and disciplining people's expertise and using peer to peer networks to communicate changes.

Managers love empowerment in theory, but the command and control model is still what they trust and know best. For their part, employees are often ambivalent about empowerment – it is great as long as they are not held personally accountable. (Argyris, 1998). Even the change professionals often stifle empowerment. Thus, despite all the best efforts that have gone into fostering empowerment, it remains very much like the emperor's new clothes; we praise it loudly in public and ask ourselves privately why we can't see it.

We might well ask whether everyone must participate in order for empowerment to exist in an organisation. In principle, the answer is "yes"; in reality, there is a "but". It is unrealistic to expect management to allow thousands of employees to participate fully in self governance. The degree to which internal commitment is plausible in any organisation is certainly limited. Moreover, the extent of participation in corporate goals and aspirations will vary with each employee's wishes and intentions. This commitment, sometimes referred to as orientation or engagement is a key issue in the success or otherwise of any empowerment strategy.

It is important to remember that empowerment is a goal that many private sector organisations approximate but never quite reach. Despite the much vaunted public sector ethos the fact is that it is possible to have various levels of engagement in an organisation and still get the job done to an acceptable standard. Curiously, employees have no trouble understanding the need to keep within bounds. There are very few examples where employees make unrealistic demands about empowerment. For top management, then, the essential thing to know is that there are limits to internal commitment.

Employees commit themselves in two fundamentally different ways: externally and internally. Both are valuable to a successful organisation, but only internal commitment reinforces empowerment. External commitment, sometimes referred to as contractual compliance, is what an organisation gets when the workforce have little control over their destinies. Argyris proposes;

“It is a fundamental truth of human nature and psychology that the less power people have to shape their lives, the less commitment they will have”.

If managers and supervisors and charge hands insist on single-handedly defining work conditions and processes for employees, then those employees will almost certainly be externally committed. It could be argued that commitment is therefore external because all that is left for them to do is what is expected of them. The employees will not feel responsible for the way the situation is defined. How could they if they did not do the defining? If organisations want employees to take more responsibility for their own destiny and by association that of the organisation they should be encouraging the development of internal commitment. This internal commitment comes largely from within. A report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2006) supports the view that employees as individuals are committed to a particular project, team, person, or priority based on their own reasons or motivations. Therefore by definition, internal commitment is participatory and very closely aligned with empowerment .

How can employees feel empowered if someone is always “selling” them or controlling them from the top down? Indeed, such champions would not be necessary if employees were internally committed. The result of all these interventions is disarray. Managers and the change programs they use undermine the empowerment they so desperately want to achieve. Why does this occur?

Could it be that today's top level managers don't truly want empowered employees? In truth, they are probably unsure. At the same time, employees do not hold executives to task for their behaviour. Employees have their own mixed feelings about empowerment.

Management says it wants employees who participate more. Engaged and committed employees say they want to be more involved. Engaged and committed employees push for greater autonomy; management says the right thing but tries to keep control through information systems, processes and limits. (Towers Perrin, 2003) present a wide range of statements in support of this. Employees see vestiges of the old command and control model as confirming their worse suspicions that superiors want unchallenged power. Management just wants to see improved performance. Thus the battle between autonomy and control continues and meanwhile the potential for real empowerment is squandered.

Beirne, (2006) suggests that empowerment serves the economic and social self-interests of modern professional managers, enhancing their ability to mobilise resources and secure organisational objectives. He argues that for prescriptive commentators such as Peters, Kanter and Sid Joynson, managerial opposition to employee empowerment is irrational and unhealthy. From their standpoint, there is nothing to fear or to reasonably argue against. By giving workers a measure of decision-making power, managers are exploiting the knowledge and capabilities of staff more effectively, improving their own results, and consequently their professional and personal standing, at the same time. Empowerment is conceptualised as a positive-sum activity that adds to the overall stock of power in a double win situation that favours workers and managers alike (Foy, 1994). Rational managers who allocate power to their subordinates will capture the attention of executives, shareholders and competitors, enlarging rather than depleting their own capacity for influence as their departments or work teams outperform those governed by more conventional, Tayloristic measures.

Despite the resources and activity levels invested in promoting this prescriptive, logic, important theoretical questions remain unanswered. Is power really a resource that can be given or, for that matter, taken away? Should empowerment be regarded as something that is 'done' to marginalized workers by the more enlightened of corporate power-holders?

From this angle the managerial interest in empowerment has more to do with control than competitive concerns about quality, flexibility or market responsiveness. It serves an ideological purpose, concealing deep-rooted beliefs about the legitimacy of hierarchical authority, and making the extensions and consolidation of managerial prerogatives seem more palatable to staff. Yates et al, (2001,) argues that the purpose of empowerment is not to give power to employees, but to take it away, to masquerade for greater managerial control over the nature and intensity of the work process. In effect, the heirs to the Taylorist tradition use empowerment as doublespeak to sweeten manoeuvres that workers might otherwise resist thereby consolidating established power relations and reducing the potential for any independent challenge to managerial decisions (Luke, 1974).

Many companies that claim to empower employees in practice do nothing of the sort. There is evidence of window dressing and appearance management, with lots of schemes in various contexts favouring rhetoric over substance. They offer an impression that progressive management is at work, yet fail seriously to challenge, or regularly slip back to, more conventional values and command structures. Hopes have often been raised and then dashed, while legitimate concerns have been dismissed out of hand. From their own experiences, a large number of managers and employees consider empowerment schemes to be hollow or unpalatable, variously expressing scepticism, cynicism, frustration and distrust.

Nicholls, (1995) when discussing delegation and empowerment states that

“it is always fascinating to hear managers agree about all the virtues and benefits of delegation, but conclude by lamenting that they have no one who is capable of taking on the extra responsibility.”

This is often accompanied by a feeling that their managerial work is far too important to be delegated – or by the fear that a dangerous rival might be created.

He suggests that in the first instance you should look at empowerment in the existing job to make optimum use of current capability. Managers who achieve this could be called ‘enablers’, using people’s current capability to the full.

The second state of empowerment is to stretch people beyond their current capability to so help them fulfil their potential. This occurs when enablers act as coaches, using delegation to expand capabilities.

The third stage is to extend empowerment throughout the organisation. In stages one and two the focus has been on individuals being empowered by managers, who act initially as enablers and then as coaching enablers, stretching people to their full potential. This creates a firm base for the third stage, in which managers become 'visionary enablers', creating an environment for self-managed teams, where changing attitudes lead to the empowerment of the whole organisation.

At this stage, managers find that, by letting go of authoritarian power, they have learned how to energise people. This is the ultimate goal of empowerment; a committed workforce with everyone devoting their full energies to achieving a common vision.

Lashley (1999) proposes that the use of empowerment in service sector organisations reveals varying forms of empowerment being applied in practice. He identified a range of definitions being applied and suggests that these differing perceptions of the service need and relevant match with the management of employees is a direct consequence of the different service offers being made to customers. He suggests that there are only two distinct service delivery approaches; "Some service offers require employees to exercise discretion in detecting and delivering customer service needs.

However in other cases, the service offer is highly standardised and require employees to practice service delivery in "*the one best way*". (Ritzer,1993)

This "one best way" is referred to as being "McDonaldized" as it assists in the delivery of consistency and predictability of highly standardised processes and products to customers. (Ritzer,1993)

To find a definitive description of '*empowerment*' is almost impossible as it means different things to different organisations (Green, 1997) However, there is a common denominator in the kinds of behaviours used and encouraged in these organisations; and it is then a question of degree – how far down the road an organisation feels it is able to go.

A survey undertaken by The Industrial Society (1995) which included hundreds of organisations nationwide, both large and small found that as many as one in five

managers would describe their organisation as already becoming empowered. Remarkably, more than half expect their organisation to reach this point over the next three years. So, whatever it is, it is already a potent force in management today.

In essence, empowerment is passing both responsibility and authority to make decisions to the people most closely involved in the task. It is moving away from the 'command and control' culture where managers make the decisions and employees implement them, It is harnessing the brainpower and initiative of every individual in an organisation, not merely a handful of people at the top.

(Green, 1997) proposes that the people who feel most threatened by empowerment are the middle and first line management. They have usually got where they are by using the skills of decision making and then directing and controlling their staff. They are being asked to stop behaving in this way, to hand their power over to their subordinates and to assume a role, which can often feel to be of lesser importance. They may worry that there is little or nothing left for them to do and they may be redundant.

The majority of staff will accept the opportunities and challenges which empowerment offers. Most believe themselves more capable than managers give credit for. However, there will always be a few for whom no amount of coaching or training will bring about a change of attitude and behaviour. Organisations need to be prepared and to have decided how to handle this minority so that they do not undermine the morale of more enlightened staff.

It becomes apparent through the academic literature that empowerment comes in many forms and many definitions. Clearly that gives rise to generalisations of whether or not employees are empowered, whether or not managers are empowering and whether empowerment is in fact a worthwhile strategy in a specific service delivery context. The following section discusses how empowerment could be applied in a public service context.

3.4 Application of the Empowerment Principles

In applying the principles Lashley (1994) proposes that there are four managerial intentions for empowerment;

- Empowerment through participation

- Empowerment through involvement
- Empowerment through commitment
- Empowerment through delayering

These are shown below in Table 1 including suggestions for the management meanings as well as possible initiatives used to achieve the outcomes.

Table 1

Managerial meaning	Initiatives used
Empowerment through participation	Autonomous work groups "Whatever it takes" training job enrichment Works councils Employee directors
Empowerment through involvement	Quality circles Team Briefings Suggestion schemes
Empowerment through commitment	Employee share ownership Profit-sharing and bonus schemes Quality of working life programmes (job rotation, job enlargement)
Empowerment through delayering	Job redesign Re-training Autonomous work groups Job enrichment Profit-sharing and bonus schemes

Empowerment through participation is closely related to the previously described (Bowen and Lawler, 1992) definition because it is chiefly concerned with empowering employees with a decision making authority in some aspect of the work which had formally been the domain of management.

Empowerment through involvement is chiefly concerned with gaining from the experiences and expertise of service deliverers through consultation and joint problem solving. The managers continue to make the decisions: but with inputs from employees. This is probably the weakest application and weakest definition of empowerment but one that is prevalent within several of the sample authorities.

Lashley, (1999) then suggests that by overlapping and interrelating those two particular initiatives namely participation and involvement a state of empowerment

through commitment evolves in the hope that improved employee commitment will result from the changed arrangements. The importance of employee commitment and engagement are discussed later in this report. As with Barbee and Bott's (1991) definition of empowerment, the initiatives are ultimately about employees taking more responsibility for the service encounter and should appeal to both extrinsic and intrinsic sources of job satisfaction.

Lashley's (1999) final definition empowers managers within the management hierarchy. In simple terms levels of management are removed through layering meaning managers are no longer as closely supervised and are empowered to make more decisions. Layering or restructuring or transforming as it is now referred to is a common feature throughout the public service in recent years. Implemented at regular intervals within local authorities as a cost cutting exercise or more generally as the first perceived task of any newly appointed Chief Executive. Any restructure that removes layers of management inevitably brings about a call for more empowered front line employees. However this is brought about through necessity rather than through strategic planning. It is sold to staff as a means of self development as well as a way of adding value to the service and the customer experience. With fewer levels of line management following a restructure the decisions need to be taken closer to the front line. Why not use the positive and persuasive arguments for empowerment as the vehicle to introduce this new way of working?

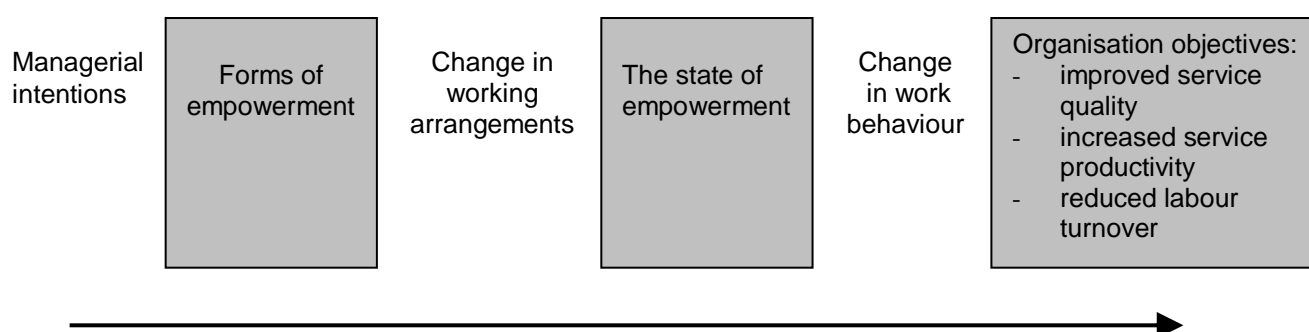
For the organisation, empowered employees are encouraged to be responsive to customer needs in the belief that a greater level of customer satisfaction is likely to follow. In these circumstances, orientations to work and needs are likely to be important factors in the way the individual within the organisation interprets and responds to a particular change (Alpander, 1991).

In the case of public service workers (or indeed any service workers) the objectives will be to improve service quality, service worker productivity and job satisfaction. (Lashley, 1999) suggests that "empowerment appears to offer the prospect of engaging the employee on an emotional level which ensures commitment to organisational objectives, but which also ensures control of the employee's performance because they have internalised the organisations policies, procedures and commitment to its customers".

It is argued that appropriate levels and types of empowerment given to employees must depend on the degree of task complexity (or variability) involved in delivering the services combined with the complexity (or variability) of customer needs. (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998).

The four features of the managerial intentions should not be seen as being mutually exclusive. Managerial actions will be driven by a mixture of motives, and hence will encompass more than one or all of them. However, (Ripley and Ripley, 1993) suggest that whatever the intentions of managers, initiatives which claim to be empowering will be translated into concrete practical arrangements which set the limits and boundaries within which the empowered operate. This is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2



For the organisation, empowered employees are encouraged to be responsive to customer needs in the belief that a greater level of customer satisfaction is likely to follow. In these circumstances, orientations to work and needs are likely to be important factors in the way the individual within the organisation interprets and responds to a particular change (Alpander, 1991) In the case of private sector organisations, managerial initiatives to empower employees are introduced in order to meet commercial objectives. In the case however of public service workers, or indeed any service workers the objectives will be to improve service quality, service worker productivity and improve job satisfaction.

The government's modernisation agenda focuses strongly on consultation with particular regard to the needs and desires of the customer. User satisfaction surveys, community empowerment initiatives and recently introduced National Indicators attempt to measure how local and bespoke services are as well as how much influence the local community feel they have in shaping those services.

The special nature of services delivered by contact employees should allow them to have the authority to make prompt decisions. This gives the opportunity to correct mistakes and avoid problems. However not all decision making should be decentralised as certain strategic decisions concerning overall strategy, business missions and service concepts should still be made centrally. (Gronroos, 1990).

Rafiq and Ahmed, (1998) propose that the reasons for empowering employees can be divided into those that improve the motivation and productivity of employees and those that improve service for the customer and market the service products more effectively.

An empirical study undertaken by Singh, (1993) found that contact service employees experience less role ambiguity when given decision-making latitude. A consequence of this being greater enthusiasm for the job and increased job satisfaction.

"Empowerment also leads to quicker response by employees to the needs of customers as less time is wasted in referring customer requests to line managers. In situations where customer needs are highly variable empowerment is crucial in allowing employees to customise service delivery". (Spiro and Weitz, 1990).

Bowen and Lawler, (1992) however propose a counter argument to this suggesting that empowerment can also slow down the service delivery process as empowered employees attempt unnecessarily in some instances to individualise the service for customers. This they argue also reduces the overall productivity of the service. They further suggest that the degree of empowerment can vary from control orientation at one end and involvement orientation at the other.

When specifically considering the delivery of public services it is important to recognise that many different types of services are provided. This makes it important to distinguish between the types of discretion exercised. The appropriate degree of empowerment for the different types of services provided can be broken down to the level of creative or routine discretion exercised by front line employees. Clearly a high degree of routine discretion is not the same as a high degree of creative discretion. (Kelley, 1993).

According to Bowen and Lawler (1992), there are five contingencies of empowerment namely: business strategy, tie to the customer, technology, business environment and types of employees. Although this taxonomy is useful in outlining situations in which service employees should be empowered, (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998) suggest that the major weakness of the Bowen and Lawler (1992) contingency framework is that it does not distinguish between customer and employee related contingencies. They propose that types and levels of empowerment given to employees should depend on a combination of the complexity (or variability) of customer needs, and the degree of task complexity (or variability) involved in delivering the customer needs. They argue that in services the degree and type of interaction between customer and front line employee can have a major impact on the degree of complexity of the task.

Referring back to the need for customer perspective to have significant importance it could be argued that the organisation should examine its various service products from a customer perspective, identify the essential features that are important to the customers and build an appropriate empowerment strategy around them.

The following major facets of customer needs complexity for services are: service product complexity, customer needs complexity/variability, importance of speed of service, customisation and the importance of service quality. (Rafiq and Ahmed 1998). They suggest organisations should consider links between these features of service and appropriate empowerment strategies.

When the service product is assessed as complex customers will expect a high level of expertise from contact employees. Hence, from the customers perspective, the greater the product complexity the greater the need to empower employees. In these situations high levels of empowerment give the customers greater confidence in the ability of the employee as well as the organisation to deliver the service. Similarly the more complex or variable the needs of the customer are the greater the need for empowerment. Where customers needs vary from a standard service product they will still expect the correct response from the contact employee and will not wish to be held up while an employee consults with the line manager.

An important aspect of any service product is the speed of service. Customers expect service delivery to be not only efficient but also fast. (Schneider and Bowen 1993). Where an organisation determines that the speed of service is important, the

less appropriate is empowerment as speed should be gained by simply standardising service delivery routines. The degree to which customers require products to be tailored to their specific needs i.e. customised, the greater is the need for empowerment.

The Best Value agenda concentrated on the final aspect, that of the importance of service quality. An empirical study undertaken by Berry *et al.* (1994) showed that customers assess service quality on five key areas in the following order of importance namely: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. The responsiveness, assurance and empathy variables are obviously heavily dependent on contact employees. Therefore the higher the level of expectation on these specific variables the higher the perceived service quality anticipated by the customer, the greater is the need to empower contact employees.

An organisation must initially determine the various customer needs. This must be done in consultation with those customers through community consultation and empowerment. The task complexity and variability will determine the level and appropriateness of any empowerment strategy. (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998). Generally the greater the task variety the greater is the need to empower employees. The greater the requirement for employees to be creative the greater is the need for empowerment and creative discretion. The degree of complexity of the task in relation to the number and sequence of steps required to perform the task define the task complexity. The need for empowerment correlates and varies directly with the task complexity. The degree to which the service delivery process is important in comparison with the product itself. Product focus relates more to a production line orientation whereas process orientation would require greater empowerment (Johnston and Morris, 1995).

The thrust of any customer improvement strategy depends on any added value at the point of contact. (Maister, 1983) refers to the proportion of value added by contact employees (front office) compared with back office employees. The greater the value added by front office employees, the greater is the need for empowerment.

However, Chase, (1978) investigates this further and makes reference to the actual contact time per transaction spent by the employee in delivering the service, compared to the total time spent by the customer in receiving the service. Chase

suggests the need for empowerment also varies directly with the contact time between the service provider and the customer.

The most common proposal throughout the research suggests that complexity and variability of customer relationship with the organisation is the key consideration when considering the need to empower employees.

The issue of complexity and variability however has not been tested in the primary research data as no information was gathered regarding the various customer needs specific to the particular key informants. It was therefore not possible to apply this theory.

Peters, (1990) however, supports such a link when stating that "It is increasingly clear that we won't achieve necessary customer-centered breakthroughs unless we first embrace dramatic organisational change. Radical improvement in the way we serve customers will only follow from radical improvement in the way we organise ourselves".

Like many fashionable initiatives empowerment has become an end in itself for some managers rather than a key building block in the organisation's business strategy. Many managers see empowerment simply as a matter of personnel relations and policies rather than being used as a means of improving productivity, raising quality standards or improving relationships with customers. Where empowerment is introduced without detailed consideration of the above factors it is an inappropriate strategy, the result is either employees being told they are empowered but aren't with a mixture of conflicting and possibly damaging decisions by front line employees. Similarly not all front line staff want the discretion of decision making power that accompanies empowerment. Some employees may demand involvement without wishing to accept the responsibility and accountability that accompanies such empowerment. (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998).

On face value, empowerment as discussed by (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998), (Peters, 1987), (Barbee and Bott, 1991) and (Conger and Kanungo, 1999) has much to offer organisations providing services. Empowered employees will react to customer needs as they arise, they will respond quickly to complaints and will take personal pride in ensuring that service encounters are a success. Importantly, they will feel pride and concern for the customer experience.

A more reflective consideration suggests that claims for employee empowerment need to take account of different definitions and meanings used by managers. Perceptions and concerns about the needs of the particular operation will shape these different managerial meanings in question. At root these are focused on questions about the nature of the problem. Is the concern to gain greater commitment, or is it to benefit from the experiences and suggestions of front line deliverers, to encourage more participation in the service interaction, or to flatten the organisational structure so as to make it more responsive to its customers?

Peiperi, (1997) posed the question "Does empowerment deliver the goods"? and concludes "successful empowerment will require feedback on performance from a variety of sources, rewards with some group component, an environment which is tolerant of mistakes, widely distributed information, and generalist managers and employees".

Harrington and Williams, (2004) considered the emerging role of the middle manager with a particular emphasis on the impact of an empowerment programme.

Improving quality has become the goal of many organisations and introducing such programmes has resulted in several accounts documenting the risks and failures attached to implementing these initiatives. Middle management resistance has been cited as a common form of resistance, though it is widely recognised, even among managerial groups, that commitment from this level within the organisation is essential if implementation is to have any chance of success. This commitment or engagement is a recurring theme throughout this research project.

The middle managers role within today's organisation has changed considerably. As already discussed through restructuring of councils those councils have effectively downsized, employees have had to become empowered, and the middle manager feels that his / her position within the organisation is becoming less and less important.

Second there is a marked shift away from directive, hierarchical leadership structures to more participative equality among group members. Finally, technology, competition and customer expectations require that organisations are highly responsive and adaptive to customer requirements. If one company does not

respond to the customer needs another one will. This is not as serious a threat to public sector organisations as it is to private sector organisations as citizens have no choice in provider. However the threat is one of possible externalisation if the service is inadequate or more probably a poor rating from Audit Inspector assessments. Literature would suggest that both sectors accept that the use of empowered front-line staff who function in teams is the best way to provide rapid response to changes in customer needs as they occur.

In considering the agenda for public service improvement (Hartley and Skelcher, 2009) also recognise that public service organisations do not choose their markets, but are obliged to provide services to anyone who meets the eligibility criteria. They consider a long term problem will be to understand the conditions under which improvement strategies, and their implementation in complex settings, make a difference to the performance of public services

It has been established that the involvement of employees in decision making in an organisation is widely advocated. This is what I would classify as a weak form of empowerment and is evident in many of the sample authorities. It is accepted therein as empowerment.

Employee involvement is fundamental to quality management ideas, both in terms of an educational process and also more direct involvement in quality issues and how it relates to the job (Wilkinson, 2001).

Scarnati and Scarnati, (2002) state that 'Empowerment provides significant advantages throughout the organisation. First, it makes people feel vital to the success of the organisation – it is also a vote of confidence in the employee's ability to significantly contribute to the organisation. Second, empowerment builds commitment and a sense of belonging. Acceptance and ownership are basic human needs that are satisfied through the empowerment process. They propose that empowered people become involved in creating their own future. This is a bold claim which they do not substantiate. Becoming empowered can be such an influential change to working practices that it can be seen almost in the context of being given a new job however, management needs to be careful that the employees do not perceive these new jobs as controlling instead of empowering (Parker, 1991).

Hulin and Blood, (1968), found that a significant body of workers did not respond favourably to work redesign, which introduced challenge, autonomy, etc. Instead, this group of workers preferred secure, stable, routine work, which permitted opportunities to socialise with others.

Hackman and Oldham, (1980) argue that there may be a case that management may need to detect those employees who are low in growth needs and would prefer routine work, prior to empowering the entire workforce.

Harrington and Williams, (2004) propose that Total Quality Management promises to empower front-line employees, giving them more responsibility and information, which changes the middle managers' traditional role in implementing and monitoring the instructions of top management. It is important that senior management realise that the role of middle managers clearly must be redefined if total quality programs are to succeed. Middle managers themselves must be empowered to determine the direction of their respective areas, given the resources to achieve area goals, and authorised to empower other employees. Empowerment at all levels in the company being inadequate can be a cause of TQM failure. Teamwork is a result of successful empowerment of people within the organisation. Empowered employees are more likely to provide course correction input. However, an empowered employee who lacks confidence is just as bad as the unempowered one.

The evaluation of the Best Value regime has also provided evidence to suggest that between 2001 and 2003 authorities increasingly engaged with front line staff in the course of the reviews. Officers believe that more power has been devolved to front line staff. Some 73% of respondents to the meta-evaluation survey from the ODPM (Martin & Bovaird, 2005) reported that staff had become more engaged in decision making in their authorities since 2001.

The report concludes by saying that

"The links between devolution to the front line and service improvement is an area that requires further research".

The 2008 follow up study (Martin) again showed a rapid improvement in reported performance in environmental services, particularly in terms of value for money and efficiency.

3.5 The Impact of Leadership

A recurring theme throughout the empowerment literature is one of the possible impact that leadership could create. The literature suggests that without a positive role model as leader any empowerment strategy is destined for failure. A successful leader can be considered to be successful in comparative, not absolute terms, and the starting point has to be against objectives. (Likierman, 2009). These will have to be set out beforehand (making them up afterwards is definitely not acceptable), may need to be changed over time to respond to changing circumstances and do not all need to be fulfilled. But the degree to which a leader meets his or her stated objectives will be a key factor in judging success.

Likierman argues that successful leadership is not what leaders do or who they are. It isn't just what the organisations they lead manage to achieve, which may be down to many other factors. Successful leadership is about a successful outcome against stated objectives combined with comparisons against a relevant peer group and the way in which opportunities are handled.

Morgan, (1988) in considering the many challenges in dealing with the rapid changes confronting organisations into the 21st century with which senior managers must cope included as a suggested strategy;

- Generating flexibility and freedom by giving employees autonomy through empowering them.

To implement such a strategy would however require a change of corporate culture so that innovation, learning and creativity were encouraged, (McAuley, Duberley and Johnson, 2007). Gone was the old-fashioned notion of hierarchy in which one member directed the activities of another, (Morgan, 1988, p.129).

The analysis of the ten sample authorities chosen for this research suggests that on many occasions where the performance has improved over a short space in time this has been credited to the arrival of a new leader in the form of a new Chief Executive. A new leader with a new vision has a desire to and, it would appear can bring quick wins to a council. This paradox of quick wins is the subject of research undertaken by Van Buren and Safferstone, (2009). The research looked at the success opportunity of a quick win but more importantly it also examined the struggling leaders. In that group, they saw a high incidence of five problematic behaviours: focusing too much on details, reacting negatively to criticism, intimidating others, jumping to conclusions and micromanaging the people reporting

to them. Looking over that list, they considered that these were traps that leaders could fall into if they were hell bent on securing quick wins.

Leaders new to their roles often try to prove themselves by going after quick wins. In the pursuit of early results, however, they can easily fall into one or more of the five traps, which paradoxically undercut their success.

To escape these traps they felt new leaders must shift their focus from their individual achievements to their teams' "collective quick wins". To do this, they must communicate a clear vision, develop people's capabilities, be willing to learn and pull everyone together to make the group project a success. In other words, new leaders who score collective quick wins must demonstrate critical career making skills in change-management and leadership.

In an empowerment context they felt that micromanaging was one of the five behaviours to avoid. Leaders new to their roles often make the mistake of meddling in work they should trust others to do. Unwilling to take the time to get direct reports on board with an overall vision or goal – but afraid their decisions and actions won't align with it – they second guess and micromanage.

How can transitioning leaders avoid the quick wins paradox? Not by abandoning the quest for early results. The analysis undertaken by Van Buren and Safferstone demonstrated that leaders who make the most successful transitions do, in fact, focus relentlessly on quick wins. But they focus on a different kind of achievement. Rather than riding roughshod over others to prove themselves, they pursue "collective quick wins," accomplishments that make their entire teams look good. This can only be achieved by inclusion and effective engagement and not by micromanaging.

Effective Leadership and Devolution to the front line has also been recognised as a key driver to performance improvement within many of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) White papers. Between 1998 and 2001 more than 20 policy White Papers were introduced to modernise local government. Many of these White Papers were subject to individual research evaluation. In an attempt to evaluate the combined impact the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned a meta-evaluation. The original evaluation was published in March 2005 with a further report assessing the cumulative impact of the individual policies

over the 1998 – 2007 period being published in February 2008. The remit of the studies was to identify the initiatives which have been the key enablers of desired changes over five over-arching areas:

- Service Improvement
- Accountability
- Community Leadership
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Public Confidence

Each of these has been subject to a separate report. This section looks at the outcomes of the Service Improvement report specifically:

- Have local authority services in England been improving?
- Are improvements due to LGMA policies?
- What are the implications of these findings for policy makers and practitioners at national and local government levels?
- What have been the key drivers to improvement?

The research was undertaken by a team from the Centre for Local and Regional Government Research at Cardiff University.

Key findings were that the evidence suggests that between 2000 and 2004 there had been significant improvements in most services. Overall improvement was 12.5% however there was a large variation with the greatest overall improvements coming in culture and waste management. The evidence also suggests that improvements have been largely due to increases in available resources but also due to key elements of the LGMA specifically Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the Best Value Regime. (Martin & Bovaird, 2005) The main drivers of improvement have been:

- **More effective Leadership**
- **Devolution to the front line**

- Performance Management
- Engagement with service users
- E-governance

Leadership and devolution to the front line were considered to be key elements of a successful empowerment strategy and therefore warranted further analysis from the meta-evaluation report. The report suggests that leadership by officers and executive members has been an important factor in driving improvements in CPA scores and is positively associated with reported improvements in service quality, value for money, and responsiveness to service users. Increased engagement of staff in decisions has been associated similarly with improved CPA scores and improvements in all of the main elements of service performance. Again however the terminology “increased engagement of staff in decision making” does not infer a serious attempt at empowerment. The greatest improvements mentioned in the report have been achieved where there has been a combination of increased funding, a strong focus on improvement targets and scope for significant re-engineering of service delivery. All three of these conditions apply to waste management, a service area covered by this thesis, the service in which the basket of indicators suggests that there has been by far the greatest improvement. This is further supported when looking at the public satisfaction with overall quality of services indicators between 2001 and 2005 where the highest and most increased levels of public satisfaction with services were for parks and open spaces, waste recycling and waste disposal.

The 2003 Local Government Workforce front line staff survey (Gould Williams, 2003) found that front line staff in ‘poor’ and ‘weak’ authorities were significantly more likely than those in ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ to report that their service needed better leadership if they were to improve.

One of the four principles of public sector reform emphasised by the OPSR is devolution to the front line. This is supported in the Byatt report and the 2003 Best Value circular which both identified the role of staff in delivering quality services as a key factor.

A recent study of the role of staff in delivering high quality services commissioned by the ODPM concluded that there was a strong link between staff involvement and

service quality (PWC and Cardiff Business School, 2004). Authorities responding to the meta-evaluation survey reported that the engagement of staff in decisions had driven improvement and were more likely to report improvements in all of the dimensions of service improvement except for joined up services.

Respondents to the meta-evaluation survey gave examples of where devolution control has been an important influence on improvement. Relevant examples are where devolving more control to front line staff in the delivery of street scene services has resulted in improvements.

A number of LGMA policies are designed to encourage more effective leadership. Evidence from a number of evaluations of LGMA policies confirms the importance of leadership to achieving service improvement. Dysfunctional Leadership was found to be one of a number of causes of poor performance. (Hughes *et al.*, 2004). They found that overactive or weak leadership by managers both led to failures to identify or respond to performance problems in the organisation.

The overall 'theory of improvement' which has underpinned public services policy was first set out in the Office for Public Sector Reform (OPSR) principles published in 2002.

- National Standards
- Devolution
- Flexibility
- Increased choice

This model was updated in the 2006 White paper which envisaged four main forces for improvement.

- Top down pressures of performance management
- Horizontal drivers of competition and contestability
- Bottom up drivers of user choice and voice
- Measures to strengthen capability and capacity

Beneath this framework one of the three ideas considered particularly important in influencing the 1998, 2001 and 2006 White papers is the importance of effective

leadership. (Martin, 2008). The theory which lies behind CPA is that in the medium to long term **‘front line’ services will not improve in the absence of effective leadership**. Therefore it follows that a serious and sustained failure at service level reflected not just difficulties in that service but also ineffective leadership at the heart of the organisation. Leadership specifically by service managers was important in leading to change in the case of approximately one third of the Best Value reviews which the researchers studied in detail (Martin *et al.* 2006). The study identified three key forms of leadership which had promoted improvement;

- Senior officers who had been open to and encouraged ideas for improvement from the bottom up.
- Leadership at various levels which was able to develop the case for change and persuade others in the Council of the need for it
- Leadership which was willing to see through change even in the face of opposition

A joint study by Ashbridge Public Leadership Centre and the National School of Government during May and June 2008 resulted in the production of the Public Management Index (PMI). This looked at leadership and management issues in the UK Public Sector. The main objectives of the PMI survey were to:

- Explore how managers and leaders were operating in the public sector
- Understand more about the issues and challenges managers and leaders in the public sector currently face
- Provide valuable comparisons between managers and leaders working in different sectors

The survey provided baseline data on the opinions and attitudes of public sector staff, which helped to identify areas for improvement as well as areas of good practice. The survey explored;

- Management and Organisation Challenges

- Personal Challenges
- Enlargement
- Motivation
- Training and Development

A total of 1,394 respondents working in the UK public sector responded. This group included an even split of males and females, with an age range from under 30 years to over 50 years of age. Respondents were located all over the UK, with almost half based in London, and the majority described themselves as senior or middle management. Just over half of respondents work in a central government department, with around one in ten working for a Local Authority (LA).

The key findings in relation to Management and Organisational Challenges as well as Management and Leadership were that overall views towards line management were generally positive: the majority of respondents believing that their immediate line manager was effective (77%) and made sufficient time for them (71%).

However, views regarding top leadership were less encouraging: with just over half of the respondents (55%) viewing top leadership in their organisation as effective. A particular issue with leaders related to communication with less than half of the respondents feeling that top leadership spent sufficient time communicating with staff (46%).

On average, the youngest group of respondents (age 30 years and under) hold the most positive views regarding both communication and time spent with staff with 60% feeling that top leaders spent sufficient time communicating with staff; and 83% agreeing that their manager made sufficient time for them.

With regard to decision making, approximately half of the respondents (51%) reported that they felt more involved in the decision making process than they did three years ago, although a lower percentage (39%) felt that top leadership in their organisation were moving towards a more consultative approach to decision

making. Those working in LA's (Local Authorities) felt slightly more involved in decision making (60%) than those working in central government (52%).

A particular area of concern was leadership development with only just over one third of managers (36%) who responded believing that their organisation was doing enough to develop the next generation of leaders.

As well as relating to the need for strong and innovative leadership the majority of literature on the subject of empowerment also cites employee engagement as a key component. This particular survey considered engagement and proposed that;

“An engaged employee can be defined as one who is proud, satisfied, willing to go the extra mile and speaks highly of the organisation. The PMI survey findings relating to employee engagement are high, which is positive as organisations want engaged employees because they drive innovation and move the organisation forward.”

The survey also found the overall level of engagement to be high (80%).

Engagement levels were particularly high for the youngest age group (under 30 year olds); and for those working for LA's (84%).

However, the survey findings also highlighted a number of issues and challenges. Particular areas that required attention were:

- * Leadership (effectiveness; communication; approach to decision making)
- * Leadership development
- * Approaches to motivation

However, there was a strong suggestion that senior leaders were still being perceived as being too remote and that they were not sufficiently inclusive in winning staff engagement. This was exacerbated by a perception that not enough was being done to assure future leadership.

There was a deal of support for the view that the work of the public services was steadily increasing in demand and complexity. This was partly because departments and agencies needed to employ matrix management in large internal

projects, and partly because the delivery of outcomes consistent with increasing public value was usually reliant upon several agencies working together. This led the study to conclude that reliance upon the traditional approach of authority, hierarchy and command generally found in the Public Sector was less likely to be valued in the future. Instead, there would be a greater demand for involvement, influence, and collaboration and distributed leadership. A statement supporting an empowered organisation?

MacLeod and Clarke, (2009) propose that the evidence of a positive correlation between an engaged workforce and improving performance is convincing with employees feeling they are able to voice their ideas and be listened to, both about how they do their job and in decision-making in their own department. They conclude by suggesting that at the heart of this organisational culture are engaging managers who facilitate and empower rather than control and restrict their staff. The Institute of employment studies (IES) say, an engaged employee experiences a blend of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and feelings of empowerment, (Robinson, 2008)

Recent studies propose a link between high levels of engagement and high levels of innovation. In a study by Kruegar and Killham, (2007) fifty-nine per cent of engaged employees said that their job brought out their most creative ideas against only three per cent of disengaged employees. Research undertaken by the Chartered Management Institute, Kumar and Wilton, (2007) found a significant association and influence between employee engagement and innovation. Findings from approximately 1,500 managers throughout the UK identified the prevailing management style of their organisation as innovative. Despite this assertion that high levels of engagement correlate with high levels of innovation and performance MacLeod and Clarke, (2009) suggest that overall levels of engagement in the UK are lower than they could be. This view is supported by a CIPD study by Truss (2006) who found that only three in ten of UK employees were actively engaged and by Towers Perrin (2007) who found that only twelve per cent of UK Public Sector staff are highly engaged with twenty two per cent being disengaged. However some seventy-eight per cent of those who are highly engaged believe they can make an impact on public services delivery or customer service. (Metcalf, 2008) suggests that the emphasis on good leadership and management is a crucial enabler of employee engagement. The study proposed that an engaging style of leadership

would predict performance and productivity as well as increase employees motivation and commitment.

If it is accepted that empowerment is an appropriate strategy the research suggests that a particular leadership style should be adopted. (Peters, 1982) stresses the importance of leadership rather than mere management. According to Peters emphasis should be placed on facilitating success and building the business rather than controlling others and organising work.

"A leader will delegate authority and encourage self-motivation and individual initiative". (Heller, 2000).

According to Peters (1987) and Bennis (1989) this is a shift from management to leadership and therefore a positive approach.

Bennis (1989) proposes that all organisations must be led not managed. He claims there is an important difference as many organisations are very well managed and at the same time very poorly led. It may excel any ability to handle the routine daily inputs, without questioning whether the routine should be done at all. Managers operating in bureaucratic structures are people who do things right whereas leaders are people who do the right thing. Bennis (1989) suggests that leadership can be felt throughout an organisation as it gives pace and energy to the work and empowers the workforce. Where leadership is evident as opposed to management, empowerment is the collective effect.

"Where there are leaders, work is stimulating, challenging, fascinating and fun. An essential ingredient in organisational leadership is pulling rather than pushing people towards a goal". (Bennis, 1989).

The views of Bennis (1989) are also supported by Zaleznik (1989) who states that a failure to recognise the fundamental differences between management and leadership has resulted in reliance on structure and process to guide the organisation in the absence of true leadership.

In *a passion for excellence* Peters (1984) stresses the importance of leadership, rather than mere management. He suggests that there are four functions in the practice of management that differentiate between leaders and administrators and

one should strive to fulfil the role of the leader. The leader will delegate authority and encourage self-motivation and individual initiative. (Heller, 2000)

The four functions he refers to are;

- 1 Controlling Others
- 2 Organising Work
- 3 Facilitating Success
- 4 Building The Business

According to (Peters 1984) if 1 and 2 dominate, you are an administrator and if 3 and 4 dominate, you are a leader.

As discussed earlier recent Government policy refers to a new found need for innovation in the public sector as well as a need for innovative and entrepreneurial leadership if service delivery is to improve. Concerns however have been raised about the extent to which entrepreneurial behaviours could undermine the democratic governance necessary in the public sector. The nature of, and challenges to, such entrepreneurial leadership, drawing not only on insights from the entrepreneurship, leadership and public administration literatures, but also on response from a range of public sector leaders themselves are the subject of a research paper produced by (Currie *et al* 2008)

Entrepreneurial variants of leadership, which are more individualistic, may marginalize other stake-holders' participation in democratic processes of governance (Lewis, 1980, Borins, 2000). More serious, is the spectre of the 'rogue' entrepreneur, who, lacking the integrity necessary for public office, chooses to misuse public funds, dominates or coerces others, and implements radical changes that ignores tradition. (Bellone and Goerl, 1992; Terry, 1995, 1998; DeLeon and Denhardt, 2000).

Others argue that entrepreneurial leadership may in fact converge with requirements for more democratic governance. (Heifetz, 1994) argues that solving 'wicked' problems in the public sector is beyond the capacity of any one person. (Currie *et al* 2008) argue that in this situation leadership must facilitate a process of 'adaptive work' in which those who are led (followers) undertake the difficult task of identifying what is wrong and forge possible solutions. Reflecting this, Hartley and Allison, (2000) describe how leadership in public services organisations in the

United Kingdom is no longer solely about command and control from the top of the organisation. So, rather than a notion of entrepreneurial leadership that is vested solely in the Chief Executive, we might also expect to see evidence of leadership in others throughout the public sector organisation.

Acknowledging the concerns about, as well as the possibilities for, entrepreneurial leadership the paradoxes of modernisation (that is, the co-existence of centralised control and earned autonomy, and the need for more democratic governance) serve to complicate the enactment of entrepreneurial leadership within the public sector. However, the feasibility and potential of entrepreneurial leadership in the public sector under the modernisation regime has not as yet been subject to detailed and sustained theoretical and/or empirical scrutiny.

A recent study looking at the leadership qualities required to deliver quality improvement considered the habits of an effective leader. (Lucas & Buckley, 2009). It became clear that, rather than leadership characteristics or qualities they were really talking about of the ways of working of leaders, how they think and act, their 'habits of mind' (Costa & Kallick, 2000). They distilled these down to four core habits of mind.

1. *Improvement focused.* Improvement leaders are always focusing on improvement and creating space for improvement activities. They talk about improvement as if it really matters and see enormous value in proactive communications about all aspects of internal and external change. They themselves are skilled in improvement techniques and, as role models, show how they value these, especially when they are themselves busy with day-to-day operational issues.
2. *Questioning.* Improvement leaders never stop asking questions – What are we improving? Why are we doing it? How are we doing it? How do we know if it is helping to make improvements? They are outward-looking, keen to benchmark themselves against the best. Not just content with asking questions in meetings, they are constantly out and about questioning, listening and observing, seeing this as a core commitment. They actively encourage others to ask questions and systematically learn from mistakes.
3. *Facilitating.* Improvement leaders engage with people, always showing that 'we' is stronger than 'I'. They actively seek to collaborate and see the

engagement of staff as very important. They understand the psychology of change and of influencing people and events. They are constantly looking to create space for others to develop improvement capabilities.

4. **Empowering.** Improvement leaders actively champion other improvers. They see that, for improvement to be sustainable, all staff need to develop personally, and many have specific leadership development needs. They make time to demonstrate, share and mentor.

Specific examples of priority issues included in the research are: **Innovation, leadership and new ways of working**, including the appropriateness or otherwise of management models developed for other sectors and the impact of **greater devolution of power to local managers**; metrics for improved service delivery, especially the impact of performance measurement frameworks, long and short term value for service users and funders, the effect of specific approaches such as benchmarking, quality ratings and league tables; incentives for people working on public services including the impact of extra funding on service improvement - how and under what circumstances does additional funding make the most difference? and accountability, equity, responsiveness and value for money - how managers do and might tackle the potential tensions and trade offs between potentially conflicting objectives.

Continuing the proposed link between leadership and innovation from existing leadership literature, five leadership theories are identified that merit further investigation when considering innovation; (Munshi & Oke *et al*, 2005)

- i) Trait and style theories;
 - ii) Contingency theories;
 - iii) New leadership theories, including transformational theory;
 - iv) Distributed leadership
 - v) Structuralist leadership: Leaders as architects.
- i) **Trait and style theories:** Trait theory suggests that leaders have certain attributes or qualities that make them effective leaders: they are charismatic or inspiring, for example. It suggests some people are innately better suited to

leadership. Critics of trait theory point out that it is difficult to define leadership traits or show how traits interact.

Style theory suggests that it is possible to learn to become an effective leader by studying the behaviours adopted by other effective leaders. Research has focused on two types of leadership behaviour – people-centred and task-centred leadership. Style theory remains fashionable, although critics point out that it largely ignores.

- ii) **Contingency theories:** These theories maintain that different leadership approaches are required for different contexts. Path-goal theory, for example, identifies four situation dependent styles:

Directive – task orientated;

Supportive – empathises with employees and creates a good working environment;

Achievement-oriented – sets high expectations for employees;

Participative – encourages employee input.

- iii) **Transformational and transactional leadership:** A more recent trend in leadership theory is to view leadership in terms of the relationship between follower and leader: for example, leading through ‘the active promotion of values which provide shared meaning about the nature of the organisation’. Such theories still view leadership as a set of behaviours.

One of the best-known ideas in this area is the transactional and transformational leadership model developed by academics (Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio, 1993).

Transactional leadership is where the relationship between leader and followers is based on, and limited to, an exchange of values that are of mutual benefit. The leader satisfies followers’ needs in return for compliance and conformity with the leader’s wishes. A salesperson gets a bonus for hitting targets, for example. The exchange might be psychological, political or economic in nature. Transactional leaders operate within the existing culture of the organisation to maintain the status quo.

Transformational leadership builds on the idea of charismatic leadership. It is concerned with binding people around a common purpose but goes beyond traditional reward/punishment motivation. Transformational leaders engage and empathise with followers. They facilitate and teach followers, and foster cultures of creative change and growth.

These two types are contrasting but complementary forms of leadership. Both types of leadership can have positive organisational consequences, but suit different types of organisational environments. Transactional leadership is likely to be effective in 'stable, predictable environments'; while transformational leadership 'is likely to seek new ways of working, seek opportunities in the face of risk, prefer effective answers to efficient answers, and (is) less likely to support the status quo'.

The effectiveness of these two types of leadership can be measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio which measure the behaviours involved in transformational and transactional leadership.

- iv) **Distributed leadership:** A recent and more radical leadership theory, dispersed or distributed leadership theory suggests that leadership can be found at all organisational levels and shared among many people at each level. In self managed teams, for example, power is shared between the notional team leader and the followers.

Distributed leadership is relatively unresearched. It may not be applicable in an organisational context where traditional power structures are deeply embedded. If valid, however, it has profound implications for the way we understand leadership in an organisational setting.

- (iv) **Structuralist approach to leadership:** Most of the above leadership theories, transactional/transformational, for example, are concerned with leadership as a social psychological process that motivates followers. In other words, they are concerned with the leader's behaviour, and its effect on the followers. But another important approach is to look at leaders in terms of the key administrative tasks they undertake, such as organisational design and distribution of resources.

Senge, (1990), for example, argues that the leader's task is to design learning processes. Leaders design the 'social architecture'. They are responsible for governing ideas underpinning the policies, strategies and structures which guide business decisions and actions and help build a shared vision.

They also act as teachers, coaching, guiding or facilitating people to become more insightful and empowered. Finally, as stewards, they show that they serve the people they lead and hold a personal commitment of the organisation's mission.

Research suggests that this type of leadership role, through creating an organisational context for employees, can be important in creating an innovative environment via attributes such as stretch, flexibility, trust and discipline.

Ptettor, (1999) argues that the way in which staff are managed and the culture in which they work is what makes the difference between the successful and the unsuccessful organisation. He elaborates on the merits of self managed teams and the decentralisation of decisions.

In considering a people – centred organisation (McAuley et al 2007) suggest that the actions of management and leaders are infused with a core belief in the creation of a sense of trust and open-ness to learning and development. This focus on people has clear purpose, one of gaining and sustaining the commitment of employees. This lies at the heart of human relations in modern organisations (Fincham, 2000). This has led to the type of leader that who believes they can have a major impact on the organisation by empowering organisation members (Hunt, 1991)

Managers give employees status and autonomy in an attempt to encourage them to adapt to changing situations in a manner beneficial to the organisation. (Friedman, 1977, p.5)

3.6 The Link between Empowerment, Leadership and Motivation

It is important to look at the link between empowerment leadership and motivation as the literature suggests that this is a critical factor in relation to both contact employees and managers.

Conger and Kanungo, (1999) discuss two concepts of empowerment, which are relational and motivational. Empowerment as a relational concept is concerned with issues to do with management style and employee participation. As a motivational concept empowerment is individual and personal, it is about discretion, autonomy and control. They describe empowerment as a working arrangement, which engages the empowered at an emotional level. This view is supported by (Johnson, 1993) "The empowered must feel a sense of personal worth, with the ability to effect outcomes and having the power to make a difference".

The traditional explanation for a link between improved performance and initiatives such as empowerment has focused on motivational factors —the assumption being that people are motivated by intrinsic factors and that increased job satisfaction will encourage people to work harder. However, several studies point to the importance of empowerment for both the orientations of workers and their learning. (Wood, 2007). Just as payment by results leads people to narrow their perspective, so empowerment prompts workers to take a broader view of their own roles and adopt a more proactive and flexible approach.

Empowered employees are also more likely to understand where their jobs sit in the wider organisational picture and to share their knowledge with colleagues and customers

The theory behind this approach was the view that intrinsic motivation was seen as critical to job satisfaction. Increasing the number of tasks and including some decision-making opportunities enriched jobs. (Buchanan, 1979)

The work of McGregor, (1987) and his theory X and theory Y constructs also suggest a set of arguments in support of empowerment. Whilst theory X assumes employees dislike work and are motivated purely by financial considerations (extrinsic motivation). Theory Y assumes employees would prefer to exercise self-control and contribute to the organisation so as to meet their needs for self-

actualisation (intrinsic motivation). It would suggest that theory X is more in line with a bureaucratic structure than theory Y.

Table 3 below shows how five dimensions of empowerment can provide a mechanism for identifying the boundaries and contexts set for the form of empowerment being introduced into theory X organisations and theory Y organisations.

Table 3
(Lashley and McGoldrick, 1994)

	Employee involvement in production (High volume, standardised, short time period, simple technology, theory X organisations)	Employee involvement in empowered organisation (Personalised service, long time period, complex technology, unpredictable, theory Y organisations)
Dimensions		
Task	Low discretion	High discretion
Task allocation	Seeks permission	Responsible autonomy
Power	Limited to task	Influences the direction of policy
Commitment	Calculative	Moral
Culture	Control-oriented	Trust-oriented

Bowen and Lawler, (1992) suggest that empowerment and production line approaches require different types of employees. Employees most likely to respond positively to empowerment are those that need to have their abilities tested and those that have high growth needs. Where empowerment requires teamwork employees also need to possess strong social and affiliative needs and good interpersonal and group skills. They further suggest that for empowerment strategies to succeed the organisation requires theory Y managers who will allow employees to work independently to the benefit of the organisation and its customers. Any type of service requiring a production line approach would require theory X managers who believe in close supervision and control of employees.

Successful empowerment strategies require high employee involvement adopting high discretion and responsible autonomy. The organisation needs theory Y employees and theory Y managers. (Lashley and McGoldrick, 1994). (Bowen and Lawler, 1992) suggest that employees most likely to respond positively to empowerment are those that need to have their abilities tested and those that have

high growth needs. They also support the view that for an empowerment strategy to succeed the organisation requires theory Y managers and theory Y employees.

In 2004 the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) published the results of a research study undertaken to analyse the impact of motivation on organisational success entitled CPA and employee attitudes. The Improvement and Development Agency commissioned MORI to undertake this research to better understand the relationship between staff attitudes and organisational success within local government. Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) provided a yardstick to measure success for the purposes of the study.

They proposed that local authorities, like all organisations, succeed when the people within them succeed and that by meeting their individual goals, local government staff contribute directly to the entire authority's goals. They concluded that staff motivation is a vital factor in any council's success.

The research showed that staff in the most successful councils share a common set of characteristics. They have a say in management decisions, use their initiative and creativity, and contribute to planning their own work. They are also kept well informed of organisational developments and change, and are enthusiastic advocates of their authority.

The study also considered the factors that are not affected by CPA status. It concluded that the ability to undertake interesting work and feel that something worthwhile has been achieved, access to training, workload, pay, effectiveness of line management, and job security, are all unaffected by CPA category. In common with other sectors, local government varies in its working environment. This illustrated that all councils, irrespective of CPA category can demonstrate good practice and have new ideas to share.

The results conclusively showed a relationship between CPA score and the way employees feel about their organisation and how it is managed. On most factors, employees working for Excellent and Good authorities are more positive than employees in other authorities, with employees in Poor authorities are not surprisingly, less positive overall.

The study found no real difference between Excellent and Poor authorities in terms of the following:

- Employees' ability to do interesting work and feeling that they have accomplished something worthwhile;
- Having access to the right training;
- An acceptable work load;
- (un)satisfactory basic pay;
- effective, open and approachable line managers; and
- job security.

What remained were a number of factors that seem to set excellent and good authorities apart from their fair, weak and poor counterparts.

At the most fundamental level it appeared that the most successful authorities are those that value and recognise their employees by allowing them greater input into the decision making processes of the authority, and perhaps, as a consequence, providing more room for individual creativity to flourish. Communications are also considered a key element, with Excellent authorities much better at keeping their employees informed than others.

On all of these factors, there are major differences. Employees working for Excellent authorities are much more likely to say they:

- are satisfied with their ability to have an input into work planning; and
- have opportunities to show their initiative. Does this indicate a more hierarchical culture in Poor authorities, leaving less room for individual creativity to flourish?
- Rate their line managers more positively on their willingness to listen to employees' ideas. Three in five employees in Excellent authorities agree that this always applies compared to just over two in five in Poor authorities.
- Have a say in management decisions and believe that there is enough opportunity for employees to let the authority know how they feel about things that affect them and their work.

The study found a clear relationship between job satisfaction and the CPA rating with the vast majority of staff (88%) saying they are satisfied with their present job;

40% are very satisfied and almost half (48%) are fairly satisfied. Those in Excellent authorities are markedly more positive about their jobs.

There were some areas, however, where differences are marked and that set high and low performing authorities apart. Specifically, many more employees of Excellent authorities are likely to say they are satisfied with their ability to have an input into work planning and opportunities to show their initiative than those in Poor authorities.

There were few notable differences between authorities according to their CPA rating, notwithstanding the fact that on most factors, employees working for Excellent and Good authorities are more positive than employees in other authorities. The most marked difference across the CPA categories relates to line managers' willingness to listen to employees' ideas – with 63% of employees in Excellent authorities agreeing that this always applies compared to 46% in Poor authorities.

Empowerment as a driver for improvement requires a willingness from employees to be both empowered and empowering. Unconnected or disengaged staff are unlikely to buy in to any such initiative. It can not be assumed that all employees will display the same vigour and keenness to be empowered without a firm commitment to the organisation.

Tamkin, (2005) reviews commitment and highlights an early model by Allen and Meyer, (1990), which defines three types of commitment:

Affective commitment – employees feel an emotional attachment towards an organisation

Continuance commitment – the recognition of the costs involved in leaving an organisation; and

Normative commitment – the moral obligation to remain with an organisation

As noted by Tamkin, (2005), not all these forms of commitment are positively associated with superior performance – employees who feel high continuance commitment for whatever reason, but lower levels of affective and normative commitment are unlikely to produce huge benefits for the organisations.

The closest relationship with engagement is 'affective' commitment as explained by Silverman, (2004). This type of commitment emphasises the satisfaction people get from their jobs and their colleagues, and the willingness of employees to go beyond the call of duty for the good of the organisation. It also goes some way towards capturing the two-way nature of the engagement relationship, as employers are expected to provide a supportive working environment.

This point is expanded upon by Meere, (2005), who highlights that organisations must look beyond commitment and strive to improve engagement, as it is engagement that defines employees' willingness to go above and beyond designated job responsibilities to promote the organisation's success.

Some authors discuss the varying degrees of engagement employees can experience. Meere, (2005) describes three levels of engagement:

Engaged – employees who work with passion and feel a profound connection to their organisation. They drive innovation and move the organisation forward.

Not engaged – employees who attend and participate at work but are timeserving and put no passion or energy into their work; and

Disengaged – employees who are unhappy at work and who act out their unhappiness at work. According to Meere, (2005), these employees undermine the work of their engaged colleagues on a daily basis.

A key driver to engagement is the recognition of a two-way relationship between the employer and employee.

The importance of the individual being able to align themselves to the products, services and values of the organisation.

The ability of the organisation to communicate its vision, strategy, objectives and values to its staff so that they are clearly understood.

Management give staff sufficient 'elbow room' and autonomy to let them fulfil their potential. The clearest statement in support of empowerment.

The employer is highly effective at engaging in two-way communication with its staff, in particular encouraging upward communication.

Lastly, that management from the top to the bottom of the organisation are 'committed leaders', and that the key role of the immediate line manager/supervisor is recognised as one of the most important conduits to achieving effective employee engagement.

Outcome of engagement

Staff are able to get 'involved' in the organisation and feel that they are genuinely participating and contributing to its performance.

Staff have a pride in their organisation and endorse it as a place to work and do business with to people outside the organisation.

Staff demonstrate real commitment to their job and the organisation and are prepared to 'go the extra mile'.

The approach to employee engagement, discussed by (Robinson et al 2004), stresses the importance of 'feeling valued and involved' as a key driver of engagement. Within this umbrella of feeling valued and involved there are a number of elements that have a varying influence on the extent to which the employee will feel valued and involved and hence engaged.

A research report into employee engagement by Melcrum Publishing (2005) based in a global survey of over 1,000 multinationals concluded that from an organisation's point of view it is the senior executives that 'set the tone' of engagement in an organisation, whatever the size. There are a number of actions and strategies that senior management can make use of to inspire engagement among employees and motivate them to go the extra mile. The six top drivers of engagement from the senior management perspective found to be:

- Communicating a clear vision of the future
- Building trust in the organisation
- Involving employees in decision making that will affect them
- Demonstrating commitment to the organisation's values
- Being seen to respond to feedback
- Demonstration genuine commitment to employee's well being

The same report by Melcrum Publishing (2005) also examined the role of line managers in encouraging engagement. The survey results implied that the single most important action for line managers in affecting employees engagement was that of creating a climate of open communication, with some 60% of those surveyed claiming it to be the most important element.

Heintzman and Marson, (2006) point out that the private sector has, for over a decade, documented the links between employee engagement and client satisfaction, and between client satisfaction and bottom line financial results. The authors note that the third element (the bottom line) cannot be transferred directly to the public sector but based on research on the link between public service outcomes and the public's rating of overall government performance.

Whilst Heintzman and Marson, (2006) state that work is still underway to document the drivers of employee engagement they state that possible candidates are:-

- Support for the goals and mandate of the organisation
- Effective leadership and management
- Supportive colleagues and work unit
- Tools, authority and independence to do the job
- Career progress and development; and
- Workload

3.7 Central Government emphasis on Empowerment

As part of the Local Government Improvement Programme the I&DeA proposed the 'Ideal' Local Authority (August 2001). It suggested that for the local authority to be a high performer they should adopt a strategy where **employees feel empowered** to contribute their views to the future. It further proposed that there should be clarity and transparency around delegation arrangements so **people are empowered to take decisions** and there should be high levels of delegation and devolved responsibility. This view of employee participation was supported in a follow up paper by the I&DeA (July 2005).

The Best Value and Procurement: workforce Matters in Best Value Authority Contracting: Statutory Guidance consultation document issued by central Government in January 2009 re-emphasised the belief that ***an empowered public sector workforce was necessary to deliver the required service delivery improvements***. In summarising the paper conformed that the Government's public service reform strategy was focussed on giving service users the opportunity to shape services in ways that meet their needs. The delivery of high quality public services depended on many factors but the outcome was unlikely to be achieved without the commitment of highly motivated, flexible, diverse and skilled workforce, capable of providing high quality, personalised public services. This included getting the relationship right between employers and employees so that staff were supported, enabled and **empowered** to deliver those services. Developing the right workforce policies and new ways of working underpinned that relationship.

In the Audit Commission report ***A Picture of Performance*** a wide range of information on the performance of single tier and county councils in England was brought together. The report provided an analysis of the CPA scores and the corporate assessment reports for all of the 150 councils assessed along with case studies of individual councils and surveys carried out by MORI of councillors and managers in single tier and county councils in England.

The report analysed the rankings and formulated some broad conclusions including;

The best-performing councils are able to harness their capacity in order to match their high levels of ambition:

- single tier and county councils have high levels of ambition. They have set themselves demanding targets for improving the quality of life of their citizens;
- most councils assessed make effective use of their capacity – that is, their staff, money and other resources – and they have the 'raw material' to do almost anything that they want to do;
- councils with high levels of focus pay attention to their own priorities and stick with them, rather than being diverted by the latest big idea or by short-term crises;

- in councils that are good at managing their performance, staff and councillors have a shared understanding of the council's priorities and of what they must do to realise those priorities; and
- working in partnership with others is paying off for almost all single tier and county councils. Partnerships are leading to better services, and councils are using them to deliver their priorities.

The Audit Commission 2003 report *Patterns for Improvement* considered Comprehensive Performance assessment to be a substantial achievement. In relation to empowerment they stated that one of the key areas contributing to a successful Council was its strength in;

people management strategies that harness staff energies and skills to deliver council objectives;

The report concluded that this corporate strength directly influenced performance patterns at a service level.

The quality of the staff in 42 of the 149 councils assessed was praised in their corporate assessments, with the workforce being described as 'committed', 'capable', 'skilled' and 'dedicated'. In these councils there is often substantial investment in training and development, increasing the capacity of the authority to meet new challenges.

Fourteen councils placed a significant level of emphasis on the importance of understanding the level of people skills. They had systematically identified the skills required by the authority and were clear about what the authority is doing to develop such skills in training programmes.

Thirty-three councils were cited as investing in developing their managers, with dedicated programmes and courses linked to achieving the qualities and skills that they required.

One-hundred councils had an appraisal system linking staff performance and development to competencies based around service and council priorities in place – either fully or partially. At their best, these systems ensure that staff throughout the organisation know their part in delivering the council's overall priorities.

In 17 authorities staff were described as being ‘stressed’, ‘overloaded’, of having ‘low morale’ or ‘untapped potential’. There was often a match with an identified lack of management skills, particularly at middle management level. Interestingly, the single biggest staff problem identified was sickness levels which, in a significant minority of authorities, were unacceptably high and were not being managed.

This thesis concentrates on Environment Service provision and in the 149 Councils assessed less than one-half of councils do well on environmental services. Of the 149 councils, only 13 got a score of 4 and 53 a score of 3, with 20 councils scoring just 1.

The CPA judgement for environmental services brings together information on three areas – transport, planning and waste management. The following table 4 summarises the common features of good and poor performance.

Table 4

Common features of good and poor performance

The best performing councils	Common features of poor performance
Have good consultation mechanisms and focus on what matters to local people.	Lack of focus on users or partners.
Take a preventative approach to environmental management.	Achieve low levels of public satisfaction.
Use environmental services to contribute to wider sustainable development aims.	Act in a reactive, rather than a preventative way.

Source: Audit Commission corporate assessment reports

The report suggests that more specific to environmental services is taking a preventative approach – proactively identifying issues that could become problems and seeking solutions early on, rather than applying last minute actions that do not address the root cause of the problem. **An empowered workforce** could be seen to be a positive tool in this proactive approach.

The importance of leadership was recognised in inspection frameworks, in the IDeA peer review methodology and in the Commission’s report, *Change Here*, as well as in CPA.

Leadership and performance are inextricably linked, with effective leadership being widely accepted as a pre-requisite for sustained improvement.

Central Government therefore is on record as making explicit references to empowerment and leadership as pre-requisites for sustained improvement.

Current Government policy now puts equally emphasis on empowering the community as well as empowering those delivering the service, (Hilder, 2006) Milliband ODPM, (2006) (Golding, 2006). As a result more recent research is beginning to focus on that aspect of empowerment. This study, related to employee empowerment, is therefore timely and will contribute to the knowledge gap in that area. Some related research continues including an ongoing study supported by the ESRC considering working patterns in the 21st century. Moynagh and Worsley, (2005) predict that employees will have more responsibility, but not more power and that empowered workers will be workers who exercise leadership in their fields. (Taylor, 2003) in a study of 80 small and medium-sized British companies found worker empowerment was effective in improving both productivity, performance and profitability however (Wall, 2003) found that in a study of 564 UK companies less than a quarter of them reported that they empowered their employees, with more than 60 per cent of firms making no attempt to introduce such methods of participation.

Public Service benchmarking has been part of Central Governments way of measuring performance between Local Authority services. It has been undertaken and developed as part of the Local Government Improvement Project. (Coleman 1998) chaired a working party in association with a number of volunteer local authorities, representatives of the Local Government Association (LGA), Audit Commission, the former Department of Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR), the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), Deloitte and Touche and other interested individuals. This resulted in the publication of a document, which benchmarked the 'Ideal' Local Authority (August 2001). The benchmark comprised the twelve features of a fully effective local authority, which is measurably effective in leading its community, working successfully in widespread partnerships, delivering Best Value and achieving continuous improvement in all aspects of its work. It suggested that for the local authority to be a high performer **they should adopt a strategy where employees feel empowered** to contribute their views to the future. They further proposed that there should be clarity and transparency around delegation arrangements so people were empowered to take decisions and there should be high levels of delegation and devolved responsibility.

3.8 The Change Agenda

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (cipd) in a 2003 report entitled *Delivering public services through engaging and energising people* *The Change Agenda* made reference to the are many examples of outstanding change that has been achieved within the public services. It considered the public service ethos and concluded that **engagement and empowerment are key factors in bringing about improved service delivery.**

The report suggested that a service ethos permeates the public sector with most people enter the public services with a sense that they are doing something for the public good as well as earning a living.

Public servants have to be very careful about the way in which they deliver and develop the services they provide as they often operate within a detailed legal framework and are subject to the scrutiny of Parliament and the media. In addition, many public servants are professionals and they need and want to use their own judgement in the exercise of their duties.

This mix of values and behaviours can either create a basis for continuous improvement, innovation and client satisfaction or alternatively encourage a culture of caution in which everyone is watching their back. Getting into a virtuous cycle of change is not easy. It can be done only by the people engaged in service delivery.

Providing a vision, energising people and enabling them to take action was identified as a considerable challenge. It requires a new approach to the leadership, management and development of people – one that creates a framework in which innovation and creative contribution to performance improvement is balanced against the need for control and accountability.

Performance management systems which are ever more prevalent in public services are about monitoring the achievement of objectives and targets however they cannot be considered to be the main drivers for motivating the people responsible for front-end delivery. The report concluded that what is required is a leadership style that enables people to make a difference

A step-change improvement in the quality of public service is a key national objective at the heart of current political debate. It is a goal everyone wishes to

achieve but which is tough to attain. The public service is responding to this expectation – despite all the debate and the negative press. The research undertaken by the (cipd) sought out organisations and people who were making change happen across the public services.

They considered that the public bodies that are successful are the ones that have taken the opportunities that have emerged and found ways to improve significantly the delivery and quality of the different services they provide. They have done this, fundamentally by engaging, empowering and energising their people to achieve a step-change improvement in performance that they can be proud of. These organisations involve a real focus on outcomes, the successful engagement of the users of the service, releasing the potential of the people in the organisation and changing systems and processes to enable this potential to be realised.

This change agenda report aimed to go further and answer the question: 'What can we do to switch people on so that they are engaging with the need to change and feel empowered and not threatened by it?'

It looked at what has enabled this change to take place, what has switched people on and how the barriers to improvement and change were overcome.

The first enabler – which is also a driver – is the needs of service users. When faced with a crying need, service providers have found ways to overcome limits on resources to meet those needs and focus on outcomes. The second enabler is a new sense of direction and purpose. It means creating an environment where service improvement and collaboration to achieve this become the norm.

Organisations vary hugely within the public service. Some are necessarily highly centralised, operating according to rules laid down by statute and not open to interpretation. In other cases, individuals and teams provide services directly to users and have a high degree of discretion about the way in which the services are provided.

The public service ethos is well established. Many people in the sector aim to make things better for their fellow citizens and this goal provides their motivation. But for many there are negatives that get in the way of this and wear down their commitment. There are worries about exposure to risk, criticism for misuse of

funds, not following procedures or unduly raising the expectations of people inside or outside the organisation. In these circumstances, even the most enthusiastic can become demotivated. They may be able to recognise the need for change, even see what needs to be done. But many feel they will be unsupported or constrained by the 'system', or that it is not in their interest to change.

The report suggests that the key to unlocking change is where people feel they have a genuine role in creating a vision of the future and making that vision a reality. People may be reluctant about this at first. Many will feel that they have, far too often, 'seen it all before'. Some will have seen expectations raised and then hopes dashed. What is needed is to build momentum towards the vision and more importantly build trust among those involved – inside and outside the organisation. Even where there is trust in the organisation, change is normally driven from the top so there may be limited discretion lower down the structure – and an increased pace of change will most likely be viewed negatively.

An essential element is the integrity of its leaders – without it, the bond of trust needed to engage people is lacking. Trust means people are willing to contribute, particularly their specialist knowledge. People are usually experts in their own areas and know what needs to be done. They need the opportunity to contribute and the scope to communicate and agree action with other groups who also need to be involved and whose collaboration is essential.

The key themes explored in the report are:

Energising people by

- Creating an energising goal: crystallising commitment
- Leading from the front: showing integrity, establishing trust

Enabling people by

- Invigorating the top team: strengthening leadership capability
- Building a culture of empowerment: opening the door to ideas
- Working within the community: forging understanding and setting expectations

Empowering people by

- Forging teams: releasing energy, making it happen

- Aligning HR processes and practice: creating capability
- Navigating the route: seizing the chances and adapting your approach.

The Modernising Government programme, initiated by the current Government in 1999, increased the momentum of change in the public services. The objective was better government: to make life better for people and business.

The original White Paper stimulated a programme of improvement in the quality of service that affects all parts of the public services. Since the 2001 election this has been reinforced by a significant new emphasis on delivering service improvements. This has involved new investment in the capacity and capability of government to deliver for the citizen and business. Achieving this goal of significant improvement in the quality of service provided by government depends fundamentally on the abilities of managers and workforces across the public service to respond.

In order to achieve customer-focused public services, the change agenda report concluded the following principles to be paramount:

- It is the Government's job to set national standards that really matter to the public, within a framework of clear accountability, designed to ensure that citizens have the right to high-quality services wherever they live.
- These standards can only be delivered effectively by devolution and delegation to the front line, giving local leaders responsibility and accountability for delivery, and the opportunity to design and develop services around the needs of local people.
- More flexibility is required for public service organisations and their staff to achieve the diversity of service provision needed to respond to the wide range of customer aspirations. This means challenging restrictive practices and reducing red tape; greater and more flexible incentives and rewards for good performance; strong leadership and management; and high-quality training and development.

In considering empowerment as a key factor in success the report stated that the process of empowerment doesn't just mean letting go – it also means ensuring that those who are empowered are equipped to take on that new responsibility. This involves:

- **Leadership, to show the way and to 'allow' empowerment**

- Viable acknowledgement of the professionalism and commitment of staff and their desire to do their best
- Cultural change, to tolerate mistakes and allow learning
- Identifying the skills, competences and behaviours that will be needed by staff in the future
- Establishing development programmes and learning activities to enable staff to build their skills.

3.9 Organisational Considerations

Organisational considerations can not be underestimated as an issue in this debate as the level of autonomy of both the empowered and empowering may vary between organisations, particularly if different structures are evident between the public sector and the private sector. Public sector organisations still tend to be overly bureaucratic.

A bureaucracy can be defined as a form of structure, which can be found in many large organisations, public or private. Mullins, (1999). Whilst carrying out research into power and authority Weber, (1964) made particular reference to bureaucratic structures and although he didn't actually define the term, he did however describe the main characteristics of a bureaucracy.

Weber distinguished three types of authority: traditional, charismatic and legal-rational. Legal-rational he classified as bureaucratic authority based on the acceptance of the law of formal rules and procedures, and on impersonal principles. He described it as technically superior to all other forms of organisation and hence indispensable to large, complex enterprises. He saw the development of bureaucracies as a means of introducing order and rationality into social life and proposed the following characteristics;

- The tasks of the organisation are allocated as official duties among the various positions.
- There is an implied clear-cut division of labour and a high level of specialisation.
- A hierarchical authority applies to the organisation of offices and positions.
- Uniformity of decisions and actions is achieved through formally established systems of rules and regulations. This together with a structure of authority enables the co-ordination of various activities within the organisation.

- An impersonal orientation is expected from officials in their dealings with clients and other officials. This is designed to result in rational judgements by officials in the performance of their duties.
- Employment by the organisation is based on technical qualifications and constitutes a life long career for the officials.

This approach to control is familiar in public sector organisations and in many other large organisations. Tasks are broken down into constituent elements and standardised methods are adopted. This strategy only allows delegation providing there is no loss of control. (Mullins, 1999).

Stewart, (1986) summarised the three main features of a bureaucracy as hierarchy of authority, system of rules and impersonality.

- Hierarchy of authority makes for a sharp distinction between administrators and the administered or between management and workers. Within the management ranks there are clearly defined levels of authority. This detailed and precise stratification is particularly marked in the armed forces or civil service.
- System of rules aims to provide for an efficient and impersonal operation. The system of rules is generally stable, although some rules may be changed or modified with time. Knowledge of the rules is a requisite of holding a job in a bureaucracy.
- Impersonality means that allocation of privileges and the exercise of authority should not be arbitrary, but in accordance with the laid-down system of rules. A bureaucracy should not only be impersonal but seen to be impersonal.

Argyris, (1964) made one of the strongest critical claims against a bureaucratic organisation, he claims that they restrict the psychological growth of the individual and cause feelings of failure, frustration and conflict. He goes on to suggest that the organisational environment should provide a significant degree of individual responsibility and self-control linked to commitment to the goals of the organisation and an opportunity for individuals to apply their full abilities.

Caulkin, (1998) agrees that bureaucracies are limiting and impersonal as they are constructed round the post rather than the person. The hierarchical control means

that it is all too easy for individuals to neglect the larger purposes to which their small effort is being put.

Whether or not bureaucratic organisational structures are considered as a model for the 21st century is open to debate and must be considered in the light of modern business thinking and operational strategies. A major criticism of a bureaucratic organisation is the depersonalisation of the posts and the concentration on standardisation of tasks. The work design and control policies of a bureaucratic organisation are clearly defined by Child, (1988) as the breaking down of tasks into easily definable elements with formally specified methods, procedures and rules applied to the conduct of tasks with routine decision-taking delegated within prescribed limits.

In 1932, Aldous Huxley, wrote a novel entitled "A Brave New World". In this novel he referred to Weber's fears about bureaucracy, especially its static nature and its opposition to change, innovation and risk taking.

Buchanan, & Huczynski, (1997) defined a bureaucratic structure as being a structure where the important decisions are made at the top of the organisational pyramid, whilst at the bottom, standardised procedures are being used that have been developed by specialists at head quarters. There are many support staff, and many layers of hierarchy between the top and the bottom of the pyramid.

Although modern writers are critical of this type of structure, Hood, (1986) suggests that bureaucratic organisations can still be successful providing: -

- The rules were known by all
- The purpose of the rules were clear and based on a valid theory of cause and effect
- The rules were consistent with each other
- It was clear where the rules applied
- The scope for subjective interpretation was limited

In the public sector It could be argued that a bureaucracy is the most appropriate structure. For example, the delivery of services such as housing benefit and council tax must be consistent throughout the country. There is limited scope for innovation and variation of application. The research therefore suggests that this type of

structure does not support the opportunity for individual empowerment. Buchanan & Huczynski (1997) argue that, particularly in large organisations, rules and guidelines are essential for the successful co-ordination of large numbers of employees. He also argues that this approach ensures standard behaviour and performance within a group. These rules limit the creativity of staff. It would follow then, that organisations that rely on innovative and creative employees would not adopt a bureaucratic structure.

Under the governments previously mentioned modernisation agenda, public sector services must become more customer focused and to do this they are beginning to remove some of the layers of management and give front line staff more opportunity to be involved with the decision making. It is apparent that to improve the customer focus many factors need addressed, one of those being structural change away from the accepted bureaucratic structure.

This would suggest that in progressive organisations, a more flexible and reactive structure would appear to be more successful. This is because the product being delivered needs constantly improved in order to retain and increase customers. Public sector organisations on the whole adopt a bureaucratic structure with hierarchical control systems. For large organisations delivering standard products which must be consistent, a bureaucracy is still appropriate.

Weber, (1964) however suggests that the uniformity of decisions and actions is achieved through established systems and regulations.

Bureaucratic Structures ensure standardised methods are adopted with delegation allowed only providing there is no loss of control. (Mullins, 1999).

However, where customer needs are defined as complex and variable the research would suggest that this type of structure is inappropriate both for employees and customers. Bureaucratic organisations restrict the psychological growth of the individual in these circumstances and cause feelings of failure, frustration and conflict. (Argyris, 1964).

A delayed flatter structure, which brings contact employees closer to the customer, is a preferred structure where service delivery improvements are required. (Peters, 1987).

This philosophy is summarised by (Peters, 1987) when discussing achieving flexibility by empowering people. He suggests a factor in the success of such a strategy is to eliminate bureaucratic rules.

Peoples involvement, commitment and empowerment in turn are the keys to speedy organisational action. Training, team configuration, reduced structure and new roles for middle managers aid speedy action taking. But if the bureaucratic rigmarole remains, all of the above add up to nought. Now, however, bureaucracy is beyond moaning about; it is a block to survival. (Peters, 1987). Working in such a negative and sterile climate has a negative effect on productivity which in turn reduces performance

Since 1997, the Government has however sought to address these issues of low productivity by encouraging partnerships that enhance skills and lead to greater workforce flexibility. Recent research has been undertaken to consider this aspect both in the public and private sector. The research focused upon employees' response to partnership in a number of organisations and included. (Upchurch, 2009)

1. **Organisation of Work** - introduction of high performance working patterns, aimed at engendering greater job satisfaction by: enhancing skills; providing more responsibility and autonomy; and giving better job security.
2. **Communications and Commitment** - sharing information with the workforce and increasing employer/employee trust.

Key findings of that research were;

- An occupational divide in the autonomy of teams was recorded, with 'high-status' occupations having significantly more autonomy in decision making.
- Employees in local authorities with 'Best Value' programmes: felt less secure in their jobs; had less job satisfaction, experienced more work-related stress; and were less involved in decision making than those not involved in such programmes. However, they did feel better informed about changes in working patterns.
- Employees in all organisations were equally divided between those who considered involvement in decision making was good and those who held a

contrary view. Employees in manufacturing were better informed about health and safety than public sector employees.

Key implications of that research were;

- 'Empowerment' for non-managerial employees has involved extra responsibility, but not greater autonomy.
- Best Value in local authorities has been introduced for reasons of cost effectiveness and service provision quality - partnership has been used as a vehicle for change.

3.10 Public Sector / Private Sector Ethos

The literature reviewed suggests that empowerment strategies are more prevalent in private sector organisations. The government's public administration select committee in seeking to assess whether public services could deliver improvements questioned whether a differing ethos existed between the public and private sector. Almost five thousand local government professionals covering a wide range of occupations and services responded to a consultation paper. The responses were analysed by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE). APSE's mission statement positions itself as the agency that consults, develops, promotes and advises on best practice in the delivery of local authority services. APSE report that when Best Value is applied in its truest sense and improvements are driven from within, they feel that whilst the public service ethos remains strong it is very much the culture that has changed and that it is now accompanied by a desire to improve service provision. APSE Briefing Notes 65-01 (December 2001). In the analysis of the survey almost 94% of respondents intimated that they believe that there was still a public service ethos. They defined this simply as "where the provision of the service is the most important aspect". A large proportion of public service workers gain immense satisfaction from the benefit they bring to society and this is a major factor in staying in public service employment. The major difference between public service ethos and private sector ethos was seen as the need for any private sector provider ultimately to make a profit. The public service ethos however, ensured that services are provided to meet universal need rather than only when the private sector can make a profit. When asked whether a public service ethos was necessarily a good thing, some 83% indicated positively. The questionnaire went on to ask whether the public service ethos could be an obstacle to the effective delivery of services to the public. The majority of respondents (66%) felt that it was

not an obstacle to an effective and efficient service delivery. A more detailed discussion on the possible differences between public sector and private sector ethos is considered to be outside the scope of this research.

3.11 Job Design Considerations

As well as considering the structure of a local authority consideration should also be made in regards to Job design. Much service provision is the result of many varied tasks undertaken by several parties. Only by breaking these tasks down can any changes be implemented. Job design involves deciding what tasks to allocate to people in the organisation, and in what sequence to perform them and does not take into account the need for job satisfaction. Slack et al, (1998) suggests that all job design decisions should attempt to devise jobs, which engage the interest of staff, are safe, and give a reasonable quality of working life. Historically there have been five major types of job design. The first one was division of labour. This involved taking a total task and dividing it into separate parts each of which was then allocated to a different individual to carry out. This concept was found to be monotonous. Next came scientific management often referred to as Taylorism after F W Taylor. F W Taylor,(1974) was influential in getting management to break jobs down into small tasks and decide the best way of carrying out each task. Employees had little discretion with conception separate from execution, and brainpower was to be centred with management. Comparison with a bureaucratic approach is therefore in evidence.

Following this came ergonomics, which studied how the body fits into the workplace. It also looked at how people react to heating, lighting and noise characteristics. These three concepts concentrated on the job output and took little account of any need to provide job satisfaction and motivation. More recently behavioural models of job design have been introduced. They are more concerned with the employee's attitudes to their job. It is argued by Slack et al,(1998) that jobs designed to fill peoples need for self esteem and development are more likely to achieve satisfactory work performance. An alternative work paradigm was established in the late 1960's entitled job enrichment. The aim of this was to provide meaningful work for employees with some degree of control and feedback on performance. The theory behind this approach was the view that intrinsic motivation was seen as critical to job satisfaction. Increasing the number of tasks and including some decision-making opportunities enriched jobs. (Buchanan,1979). This had been

developed further using a principle of empowerment that gives individuals more scope to shape the nature of their own jobs.

From this it could be argued that the early job design concepts are concerned purely with controlling the work in a bureaucratic model with the latter two concepts concentrating more on the personal and empowering aspects of the work.

This change of emphasis and associated structure is becoming more evident. It could suggest that an organisation, which promotes employee participation and a focus on outputs, should be a more successful model than the bureaucratic model.

However the prescriptive structure and organisation of public service requires policy and direction to be dictated by national and local politics. This would therefore suggest that there is limited opportunity to deliver the service in anything other than a prescriptive manner. A production line approach to service. (Levitt, 1976).

In two articles Levitt, (1972, 1976) described how service operations can be made more efficient by applying the production line approach. He recommended simplification of tasks, clear division of labour, substitution of equipment and systems for employees and little decision-making discretion afforded to employees.

Empowerment however means 'turning the front line loose' encouraging and rewarding employees to exercise initiative and imagination: Empowerment in many ways is the reverse of doing things by the book (Zemke and Schaf, 1989).

However empowering service delivery employees is less understood than industrialising service delivery. This is largely because the production line approach is an example of a well developed control model whereas empowerment is part of the still evolving 'commitments' or involvement model. (Lawler, 1998).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Choice of Research Philosophy, Methodology and Methods

A multi stage approach has been adopted for this study to ensure each aspect is explored and interpreted.

- Stage One – A Literature Review
- Stage Two – An analysis of the most current performance data in respect to a purposive sample of local authority environmental service delivery teams
- Stage Three – The selection of strategic informants
- Stage Four – The development of semi-structured interviews in order to collect rich empirical data
- Stage Five – Analysis of Qualitative and Quantitative data

Research has a number of characteristics namely that data are collected systematically, data are interpreted systematically and there must be a clear purpose, (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). Research could therefore be defined as something that people undertake in order to increase their knowledge. Possible purposes for any research could include describing, explaining, understanding, criticising and analysing. Adopting a systematic approach suggests that research is based on logical relationships and not just beliefs (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2002).

The research process requires clarity in regard to theoretical perspective, epistemology, and their relations with applicable method and methodology, (Crotty,1998). According to Feng,(2007) every piece of research needs to be clarified in regard to methods and methodological approach. This opens up further debate in respect of which methodology governs the choice and use of methods? What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question? And what epistemology informs this theoretical perspective? Crotty,(1998) proposes four elements to illustrate a convincing and clear diagram of the relationship between epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. Crotty defines those terms as follows:

- **Epistemology** : the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology, (Crotty,1998, p 2-3)

- **Theoretical perspective** : the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria.
- **Methodology** : the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes.
- **Methods**: the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis.

Hay,(2002, p64) provides a variation to this model;

- **Ontology** : What's out there to know?
- **Epistemology** : What and how can we know about it?
- **Methodology** : How can we go about acquiring knowledge?
- **Methods** : What procedures can we use to acquire it?
- **Sources** : Which data can we collect?

Unlike Hay, Crotty does not refer to **Ontology** in his framework however Blaikie, (2000, p8) refers to Ontology and Epistemology as the 'Philosophical Building Blocks' and describes ontology as 'claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other. In simple terms ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes reality. Blaikie,(2000, p8) describes epistemology as 'the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be'. In other words claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known. In the Crotty framework **ontology** would sit alongside **epistemology** and also inform our theoretical perspective. A key ontological research consideration in this study is concerned with the nature of social entities. The central point according to Bryman, (2003) is the question of whether social entities can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. These two positions are **objectivism** and **constructionism**. Crotty proposes a third epistemological position that of **subjectivism** and defines all three as follows:

- **Objectivism** : Where knowledge exists whether we are conscious of it or not. It is foundationalist and absolute. Researchers with this position try to find causes, effects, and explanations. They try to predict events and test hypotheses. And this stands in opposition to the other two positions which seek to understand and describe rather than explain.
- **Subjectivism** : May be defined as the view that comprehending human behaviour consists solely in reconstructing the self-understandings of those engaged in performing them. To comprehend others is to understand their meaning of what they do and to understand this meaning is to understand them in their own terms.
- **Constructionism** : Believes that social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. The concepts or practices in a particular context may seem obvious and natural but are actually artefacts of that context. Individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived social reality and this reality is ever evolving as social interactions occur.

Bryman and Bell, (2003) provide a distinction by suggesting that objectivism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors whereas constructionism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors.

Bryman and Bell, (2003) suggest that an organisation should be considered as a tangible object with rules and regulations. It will adopt standardised procedures for getting things done. It will have an agreed hierarchy, people will be appointed to different jobs with a distinct and explicit division of labour. Thinking in these objectivist terms the organisation has a reality that is considered to be external to the individuals that inhabit it. Employees are expected to conform to the requirements of the organisation, they are expected to follow the standardised procedures, apply the rules and regulations, to do the jobs they are appointed to do. Bryman and Bell, (2003). In relation to empowerment an objectivist view suggests that people tell employees what to do and they in turn tell others what to do. The organisation seen as an entity is therefore a constraining force. The same can be said for cultures and subcultures as constraints as they internalise beliefs and values. The alternative ontological position constructionist challenge the suggestion

that organisation and culture are pre-determined and argue that they are the result of social constraints. Bryman and Bell, (2003) argue that if a research question is formulated in such a way as to suggest that organisations and cultures are objective social entities that act on individuals, then the researcher is more likely to comment on the properties of the organisation or the beliefs and values of members of the culture. However, alternatively if the researcher formulates a research question so that the tenuousness of organisation and culture as objective categories is stressed, it is more likely that the emphasis will be placed on the active involvement of people in reality construction.

According to Bryman and Bell, (2003) studies undertaken in the late 1990s showed that the impact of delayering and downsizing in middle management had an effect on empowerment strategies. This has resulted in negative comment through increased stress for those remaining in employment as well as positive comment in the form of a more strategic, intrinsically motivated middle manager. Adopting a social constructionist framework. Thomas and Linstead, (2002) suggests an alternative way of thinking about the reality of middle management based on the assumption that the term middle management is in itself a social construct. According to constructionism meaning is not discovered but constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, (Feng, 2007). Objectivism however sets out to establish objective regularities independent of individual consciousness and wills, and introduces a radical discontinuity between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, (Bourdieu, 1990, p.26).

4.2 Research Philosophy / Epistemological Issues

An epistemological issue is concerned with the question of what is or could be regarded as knowledge in a discipline. A central issue in this is whether the social world and that of social science can be studied according to the same principles of the natural world and that of natural science. Three views dominate the available academic literature: **positivism**, **interpretivism** and **realism**. Business and management research can draw on all three. They are different, if not mutually exclusive.

The position that affirms the importance of imitating the natural sciences is generally associated with an epistemological position known as positivism. Positivism is taken to entail the following principles (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Only phenomena and hence knowledge confirmed by the senses can be genuinely warranted as knowledge. This is the principle of phenomenism.

The philosophical stance of a natural scientist would tend to reflect the principles of positivism. This stance can be defined as working with an observable social reality concluding with law-like generalisations similar to those produced by natural scientists Remenyi et al, (1998:32). Data will have been collected in a value-free manner and analysed to arrive at objective interpretations. The emphasis will be on a highly structured methodology in order to facilitate replication (Gill and Johnson, 1997).

Those observations would be suitable for statistical analysis. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2003) argue that the social world of business and management is far too complex to lend itself to theorising by definite 'laws'. If such complexity is reduced in this objective manner rich insights are lost. Business situations are complex and fluid and in effect a function of a particular set of both circumstances and individuals. These social situations raise concerns in regard to the generalisability of the research.

Interpretivism is a term given to a contrasting epistemology to positivism. The term follows a view that the subject matter of the social sciences – people and their institutions – is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. The study of the social world requires a research procedure and a logic that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order (Bryman and Bell, 2003). One of the primary intellectual traditions that has been responsible for the anti-positivist position has been phenomenology, a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them. The phenomenologist views human behaviour as a product of how people interpret the world and through their interpretations construct the world around them.

The interpretivist would argue that generalisability is not of crucial importance. A persuasive argument the interpretivist could put forward could be the need to discover the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them (Remenyi et al, 1998:35). This is regularly associated with the term social constructionism and follows from the interpretivist position that it is necessary to explore the subjective meanings motivating people's actions in order to be able to understand them.

It is the role of the interpretivist to seek to understand the subjective reality of those that they study in order to be in a position to make sense of and to understand their, motives, actions and intentions in a way that is meaningful for those research participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). In relation to the research question whether in the view of the strategic informants an empowerment strategy could have an impact on service improvement the interpretivist stance is considered to be most appropriate. However it must be borne in mind that social constructionism also recognises that people are likely to share interpretations of their socially constructed environment.

The third position that of realism is based on the belief that a reality exists that can be considered to be independent of human thoughts and beliefs. In any business organisation this can be seen as indicating that there are large-scale social forces and processes that affect people without them necessarily being aware of the existence of such influences on their interpretations and behaviours.

This study is categorised as social science research as it involves investigating all aspects of human activity and interactivity. Grint, (2000) argues that effective leadership relies on the management of subjective meaning and that the task of leaders is, therefore, to construct an imaginary community that followers can feel part of. This could suggest a reliance on the construction of an identity and a narrative that can be used to make sense of organisational events –past, present and future. This interpretivist epistemological position represents a contrasting epistemology to that of positivism and is predicated upon the view that subjective perceptions, meanings and interpretations are the focus of social science research in contrast to the positivist focus on objects and an objective external world. This is considered appropriate for this study as it requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.

4.3 Theoretical Perspective

There are several issues at stake when characterising the nature of the link between theory and research. Firstly the question of what form of theory and secondly the matter of whether data are collected to test or to build theories. This is generally made explicit in the presentation of the findings and conclusions. Bryman and Bell, (2003) define theory as an explanation of observed regularities. The purpose of theory is to generate hypothesis that can be tested thereby allowing explanations of laws to be assessed. This is the principle of deductivism.

Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that provide for the basis for laws. In the case where the data come first that is the principle of inductivism. Science must be conducted in a way that is value free i.e. objective. However Sackmann, (1992) proposes that an inductive research methodology is required to investigate the existence and formation of organisational subcultures. (Saunders *et al*, 2003) suggest that a deductive approach is one in which a hypothesis is developed then a research strategy is designed to test that hypothesis, whereas an inductive approach is one where data is collected and theory developed as a result of the analysis of that data.

4.3.1 Deductive Theory

Deductive theory represents the most common view on the nature of the relationship between theory and research. On the basis of what is known about in a specific discipline and of theoretical considerations in relation to that discipline the researcher deduces a hypothesis that is then subject to empirical scrutiny. Within the hypothesis will be concepts that will need to be translated into operational terms. (Bryman and Bell, 2003). This requires the researcher to specify how the data can be collected in relation to the concepts that make up the hypothesis. Robson, (1993:19) proposes five stages through which deductive research can progress:

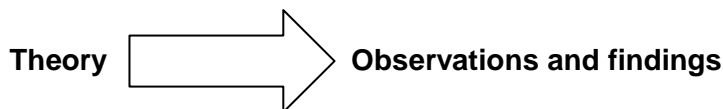
- 1) Deducing a hypothesis (a testable proposition about the relationship between two or more events or concepts) from the theory.
- 2) Expressing the hypothesis in operational terms (that is, ones indicating exactly how the variables are to be measured), which propose a relationship between two specific variables.
- 3) Testing the operational hypothesis (this will involve an experiment or some other form of empirical enquiry).
- 4) Examining the specific outcome of the enquiry (it will either tend to confirm the theory or indicate the need for modification).
- 5) If necessary, modifying the theory in the light of the findings.

Saunders *et al*, (2003) suggest that this deductive approach has a reliance on quantitative data and that the researcher should be independent of what is being observed. Gill and Johnson, (1997) further propose that a deductive approach requires the use of a highly structured methodology in order to facilitate replication.

A further key characteristic of the deductive approach is generalisation and in order to achieve this (Bryman and Bell, 2003) propose the selection of samples of sufficient numerical size to support that generalisation.

4.3.2 Inductive Theory

The emergence of the social sciences in the 20th century led social science researchers to be wary of the deductive approach. They were critical of an approach that enabled a cause-effect link to be made between particular variables without an understanding of the way in which humans interpreted their social world, (Saunders et al, 2003). With an inductive approach, theory is the outcome of the research but not necessarily the only outcome. The process of induction involves drawing generalisable inferences out of observations. Bryman and Bell, (2003) differentiate by stating that whereas deduction entails a process in which:



With induction the connection is reversed



4.4 Research Strategy – Qualitative or Quantitative?

The choice of a research strategy is informed by the nature and type of research being undertaken. Davidson, (2001, p. 82) suggests that it also involves the need to understand and employ research strategies most appropriate to the circumstances surrounding any given study.

According to Bryman and Bell, (2003) Quantitative research can be construed as a research strategy that that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data that;

- Entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories
- Has incorporated the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular
- Embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality.

By contrast, qualitative research can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasises meanings expressed through words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that;

- Predominantly emphasises an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories
- Has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world
- Embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals creation

Feng, (2007) proposes that qualitative research utilises open ended interviewing to explore and understand the attitudes, opinions, feelings and behaviour of individuals or a group of individuals. This can take the form of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. However quantitative research is applied to generalise a certain phenomenon, hypothesis or fact through social survey, experiment and official statistics. This view is supported by writers including Davidson, (1994); Sayer, (1992); Rutledge, (1993); Connolly, (1998) who state that the purpose of qualitative research is to identify, understand and explain the nature of a certain social phenomenon through participant observation, semi-structured or unstructured interviews and in depth case studies.

There are many options open to the qualitative researcher when gathering and analysing data. As with any form of writing the researcher will want to keep the reader engaged. Silverman, (2002) questions whether qualitative research should be treated any differently from good journalism or novel writing. This brings the question of whether qualitative research findings need to be credible and if so how that credibility might be sustained and recognised. Fielding and Fielding, (1986) suggest that qualitative researchers have a tendency to select their data to fit an ideal conception (preconception) of the phenomenon as well as a tendency to select field data which are conspicuous because they are exotic, at the expense of less dramatic (but possibly indicative) data.

These issues are discussed by Bryman, (1988) who suggests that there is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of data in relation to

conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews are used to provide evidence of a particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed. Silverman, (2002) purposes that in order to satisfy and convince your audience that the research findings are credible will depend on the reliability of the methods and strategies adopted.

4.5 Methodology and Methods

The research question considers the impact of an empowerment strategy on service improvement. Although central government makes reference to empowerment as a possible contributory factor in service improvement there is scant data available to develop a specific and sound hypothesis to test. Secondary data are available in the form of inspection reports and as part of those inspections the relative performance of local authorities is described and ranked. The reports however do not attempt to prioritise the factors which contribute to a particular local authority's success or failure. Those reports can however be used in order to form a view of each local authorities improvement journey. That exercise would effectively give a league table which would also show if the particular environmental services delivered had improved or deteriorated over the lifetime of the study. Those metrics would provide the author with readily accessible quantitative data from a respected source. As part of the assessments the inspectors would also interview key officers. Those interviews are included in the published assessments and could make reference to management styles as well as employee engagement. The assessments would not however provide a specific view on the subject of empowerment for each authority. It would be possible therefore to select a sample of local authorities with a league table of performance however it would not be possible from published data to ascertain whether a strategy of empowerment could have been a contributory factor. The author concluded that this study would need to concentrate on data collection rather than existing data analysis. It would be an inductive approach i.e. theory building as opposed to a deductive approach i.e. theory testing. Due to a lack of quantitative data the author would need to consider available options for further data collection. It would be possible to develop a questionnaire and send this out to sample authorities using a scalar measure of perceived levels of empowerment however as the literature suggests that there is no one agreed definition of empowerment the author concluded that this format would not provide rich data. The author instead took the decision to utilise the quantitative data available from

assessment reports and complement this with qualitative data by interviewing strategic informants from each of the chosen sample authorities.

The meaning of empowerment and its application as well as a perception of quality of service were areas of data collection that the author felt could only be collected by qualitative means. This approach according to (Parker, 1994, p.12) would provide an in depth examination of the definitions and meanings at work rather than a skim over as wide a surface as possible. In other words meaning rather than measurement.

According to (Feng, 2007) the qualitative approach has the unique ability to provide insight into the underlying issues that are most pertinent to work groups under study. It treats every study as if it were a single case study.

As a researcher practitioner the author felt he was in a privileged position to gain access to a range of employees and managers and accordingly should use that to access rich data for analysis and theory building using an inductive approach. Stanfield and Dennis, (1993) argue that in qualitative studies, the researcher is recognised as being the data collection instrument, as the ethnographer and participant observer.

Walker, (1985, p.3) suggests that analysis of qualitative material is more explicitly interpretive, creative and personal.

Quantitative and qualitative research are not mutually exclusive. (Hammersley, 1996) proposes three approaches to multi-strategy research, which can be applied to this study namely;

- Triangulation - where the use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or vice versa.
- Facilitation – Where one research strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other research strategy.
- Complementarity – Where the two research strategies are employed in order that different aspects of an investigation can be dovetailed.

In this case the quantitative research has been used in order to select the Authorities to be selected for the case studies. *Quantitative research is therefore being used to facilitate qualitative research.* Bryman, (1988) suggests that questions relating to the advantages and capacities of the two approaches would seem to be technical ones, pertaining to their respective strengths and weaknesses in relation

to particular research topics. He argues that philosophical issues figure very strongly due to the growing interest in the methods associated with a qualitative style of enquiry.

This research project therefore combines the two approaches. Quantitative data is available as discussed in the form of Audit Commission assessments including CPA metrics as well as user satisfaction surveys undertaken as part of the assessment process.

The qualitative data have been collected by way of semi structured interviews.

The use of semi structured interviews by researchers is based on the expectation that the opinions of the interviewee are more likely to be expressed in a relatively open interview situation than in a standardised interview or via a questionnaire (Flick, 2002).

As the intention of the interviews conducted in this research is to illicit the differing subjective views of the participants this style of interview is considered most appropriate. However in order to derive data suitable for analysis the questionnaire was designed around themes without stifling open debate and opinion from the participants. A key factor in the richness of the data forthcoming from the interviews was the researcher's position as a practitioner. Being in a position to introduce oneself as working in the same area of operations and effectively talking the same language immediately removed any anxiety which could have arose had it been only possible to introduce oneself as a researcher.

Willman et al, (2002), for instance, carried out semi-structured with financial traders in London covering control incentives and management style. Although the interviews had a degree of structure the questions allowed the emphasis to focus on the interviewee's point of view. This allowed the collection of rich empirical data. Bryman et al, (2003) suggest the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events-that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour. In this study the *a priori* specification of constructs will help to shape the design of the theory building research. This will give a firmer empirical grounding for the emergent theory. For example this empowerment study exploring style, freedom and control identifies several potentially important constructs (e.g. conflict, power) from the

literature review on empowerment. If several of these constructs do emerge as related to the empowerment process, there will be strong, triangulated measures on which to ground the emergent theory.

The use of interviews to gather data was considered most appropriate due to the nature of the research question. Kahn and Cannell, (1957) defined an interview as “a purposeful discussion between two or more people”. Such interviews can be highly formalised and structured, using standardised questions for each respondent, or they may be informal and unstructured conversations. There are options in between or intermediate positions. Given the specific organisational context encountered in relation to the research topic and the need to explore themes it was considered that the use of semi structural interviews would be the most appropriate. The use of semi structured interviews enabled themes and questions to be covered. Additional questions proved necessary in order to explore how a particular theme was perceived at a particular level within the organisation. The interviews became in effect discussions and the data was captured by use of digital recording.

4.6 Selection of Strategic Informants

In determining an appropriate study group many factors need taken into account. In so far as is possible they need to be comparable. There are many factors which can affect the assessment outside of internal structures and capabilities. One area of concern is the possible External Constraints on Local Service Standards (Andrews, Boyne, Law and Walker, 2005) They considered and tested whether Audit Commission inspectors’ judgement of ‘ability to improve’ were influenced by external constraints on authorities. They felt that in principle, these judgements should be based only on councils’ internal management arrangements rather than circumstances in the local area (Audit Commission 2002a; Boyne and Enticott 2004). Nevertheless it is possible that inspectors, perhaps inadvertently, took ‘degree of difficulty’ into account in assessing the likelihood of service improvements.

In order to satisfy the need for a comparable group of local authorities in terms of demography and service provision work already undertaken by APSE allowed the selection of local authorities in a “Family Group”. Some research has already been undertaken in regard to the possible effects of external factors on service standards and performance. The possible consequences and relative importance of these factors require consideration if only to gain an understanding of the need to ensure

the study group is as comparable as possible. Local authority performance is likely to be constrained not only by the quantity but also by the diversity of service needs. (Rhys Andrews et al, 2005). If local inhabitants largely have homogeneous characteristics (e.g. are mostly white middle class) it may be relatively straightforward to elicit their preferences and to provide a 'standardised' service that corresponds closely with their needs. By contrast, it may be more difficult to meet the needs of a highly diverse population (as reflected, for example, by a population composed of many different ethnic groups). First, a greater effort is required to identify the preferences of different groups and, secondly, it is necessary to provide a greater variety of services in order to meet their requirements. This, in turn, makes the achievement of given levels of responsiveness and effectiveness more difficult (and probably more expensive).

Economic constraints could also impact on performance. Geographical variations in service performance are likely to arise if some local authorities have more resources available than others. The ten sample authorities selected for this study agreed to take part on condition that they could not be identified. It is therefore not possible to name them individually. However to put the study in some form of geographical context they have been shown graphically as Appendix D. This study does not consider in any detail the possible impact that location may have in regard to performance improvement. The map included as Appendix D includes the ten sample authorities and the pilot authority and the reserve authority.

Put simply, prosperous councils can afford to provide a high quantity and quality of services, whereas poor councils face an upper limit on the extent of their responsiveness and effectiveness. The economic resources available to support service provision can be conceptualised in two ways. First, it can be thought of as the wealth or poverty of the households who receive local services. Prosperous individuals and families are more likely to be able to boost service provision through 'co-production' (Williams, 2003).

The prosperity of local service recipients is positively related to local authority performance. A second interpretation of economic resources is the money directly available to local authorities to pay for services. The allocation of central grants is intended to equalise the financial resources of different local area, by compensating authorities for high service needs and/or a low tax base (Bennett 1982: King 1984). Thus local differences in the capacity to fund service provision should be neutralised

by the grant system. However, this equalisation applies only to the expenditure required to fund a 'standard' level of service.

This study does not consider in any detail the possible ideological consequences brought about through variations in local political policy and strategy. The sample authorities show a mixture of performance over the life of the study and they were also subject to a mix of political controls throughout the life of the study. This political aspect would benefit from separate study and analysis however that analysis is outside of the scope of this study. The author does not consider it prudent to identify the political control in tabular form against each sample authority as without any detailed analysis this data would not be of any real value to this study. It could also lead to the identification of a particular authority which would then breach the agreed confidentiality aspect of the study. In general terms however looking at the ten sample authorities the political make up is as follows;

Four authorities were under Conservative control.

Two authorities were under Labour control.

Three authorities were under Liberal Democrat control.

One authority was under a Labour/Conservative/Liberal Democrat/ Independent control.

All ten authorities adopted the Leader and Cabinet model.

In regard to external constraints to be a valid measure, a performance score should be entirely uncorrelated with any background factor that a local authority can neither control nor be blamed or praised for. McLean et al, (2007) At least in the short run, an authority cannot control the ethnic mix, age profile, morbidity or morality of its local population. Many of these factors are bundled into indices of deprivation. The Audit Commission has maintained that it is not any harder (or easier) for an authority in a deprived area to score highly in CPA than for an authority in a prosperous area.

Local authorities may deviate from target figures because they have a surplus (or shortage) of 'discretionary resources' that are bestowed by historically high (or low) spending. Many studies have shown that expenditure levels in local government are extremely stable over time, and the scope for adjustment from one year to the next is extremely small (Danziger 1978; Sharpe and Newton 1984). Thus the level of discretionary resources that can be devoted to service provision can be viewed

as largely exogenous, but historically determined rather than driven by current external circumstances.

The level of discretionary resources is positively related to local authority performance. Two aspects of the local environment that have been widely tested in public expenditure models are population size and population density (Danziger 1978; Bennett 1982, Boyne 1996b). It is possible that these variables also significantly influence performance. The impact of size on performance has been debated in the local government literature for many years. (Newton 1982; Travers et al 1993). The search for an 'optimal size' for local authorities features prominently in debates on local government reorganisation in the UK in the 1970s (see Dearlove 1979), and has recently re-emerged in the context of proposals for regional government in England and the Unitary reorganisation exercise through 2008 and 2009. Economic theory suggests that economies of scale arise from spreading fixed costs over more units of output. However, the impact of larger size eventually becomes negative because big organisations accumulate administrative overheads and suffer from bureaucratic congestion (see Schofield 1978; Boyne 1996b).

The relationship between population size and local authority performance is non-linear. At any given population level, it may be harder to provide services that are high quality and cost-effective in authorities that cover a wide geographical area. For example, in order to ensure ease of access to services, it may be necessary to provide more schools, day-care centres and libraries. Similarly, 'static' facilities may have to be supplemented with 'outreach' programmes, such as mobile libraries and home social services support. The cost of providing a standard unit of service output may also rise with population sparsity – for example, in relation to refuse collection it may be more expensive in rural areas because vehicles have to travel further between domestic (and other) premises. For all these reasons, population sparsity may make 'value for money' more difficult to achieve. This particular example relating to refuse collection is taken into account when considering suitable authorities to form part of this study.

The result of testing a multivariate model on councils' ability to improve suggested that social, economic and environmental variables all appear to influence judgements of ability to improve, but the coefficient for political disposition was insignificant. However, Rhys Andrews et al, (2005) proposed another explanation for the similarity of the results in that inspectors' views about ability to improve were

shaped by authorities *existing* service standards, as reflected in the core service performance scores. In other words, councils that were already performing above average were deemed to be more likely to improve than were those performing below average.

In summary Rhys Andrews et al, (2005) concluded that the results of the CPA were based on two elements: current service performance and prospects for improvement. The statistical results suggest that circumstances beyond the immediate control of local policy-makers had a significant impact on core service performance, and that the latter variable in turn had a strong positive influence on inspectors' judgements concerning ability to improve. Taken together, these results suggest that external constraints and CPA outcomes are related. This would suggest that the impact of external constraints operates indirectly through core service performance which in turn affects ability to improve and the final CPA grades. In order to minimise any impact on this research family groupings using APSE performance networks were utilised.

Research on the determinants of organisational performance in the public sector is a small but growing area of academic inquiry (Boyne, 2003). The statistical results show that local service performance is significantly constrained by external circumstances. In particular, councils that confront diverse service needs find it more difficult to perform well. By contrast, large size and economic prosperity are conducive to high performance. These results have both theoretical and practical implications. Andrews, Boyne, Law and Walker, (2005) Although some social, economic and environmental variables were significant, other variables such as the quantity of service need, population density and the ideological disposition of the local population had no influence on variations in performance.

There is a clear danger that central government will mistakenly praise some organisations for apparent success that reflects good fortune, and blame others for ostensible failure that is attributable to an intractable environment.

In 2001 the Audit Commission report ***A Picture of Performance*** concluded that the way that the CPA framework has been designed has gone some way to reducing the impact of deprivation on the final judgements. They found no evidence of a relationship between deprivation and the judgements that councils have received for their corporate ability to improve. There was very little relationship between deprivation and councils' overall scores on current performance on services. Overall

they found some evidence of a weak relationship between deprivation and councils' final CPA categories. But because it is a weak relationship, there were many exceptions. Some of the most deprived councils appear in the group of excellent councils, and some councils in relatively affluent urban and rural areas are to be found in the poor and weak categories.

In summary the author has sought to filter the vast amount of available Audit Commission (AC) data in order to achieve a sample group with the best fit between;

- Family Groupings
- Participation in associated Performance Network benchmarking activity through APSE
- Most current AC assessment in relation to environmental service provision
- A range of performance ratings
- Identified AC interview narrative related to empowerment and contribution

The research question and objectives could be applied to all 238 English district councils. This would clearly be an unmanageable number for a single researcher. For that reason purposive or judgemental sampling is considered most appropriate. Patton, (2002) argues that there is a need to select information rich cases in purposive sampling as opposed to probability sampling which should be applied where there is a need to be statistically representative.

As briefly outlined earlier the research area for this study is English district councils. At the inception of the study this represented some 238 organisations. For a study of this type being undertaken by a single researcher who works full time the supervision team agreed a need to select a manageable sample from this audience. A decision was made to select authorities with similar demographic makeup. The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a recognised benchmarking organisation which contributes to Government bodies as well as National Audit. The Association has developed "Family Groups" which are well established and permitted the author to access a selection of authorities which are comparable. It was also decided at this stage to specifically research the Environmental Service delivery aspect only (relating to the researcher's professional expertise and providing a discrete focus of enquiry). APSE adopts a robust means of grouping authorities for each environmental service using weightings relating to key and

secondary drivers. The weightings as applied to the refuse collection service are shown here as an example. (Source APSE Management Template Notes, 2006)

1	Key Driver	Catchment Area	40%
A	Secondary Driver	Population Density	20%
B	Secondary Driver	Number of Population Centres (over 5000)	10%
C	Secondary Driver	Total Road Length	30%
D	Secondary Driver	Property types (Domestic Collections)	10%
E	Secondary Driver	Relative Wealth / Deprivation Index	10%
F	Secondary Driver	Disposal Method	10%
G	Secondary Driver	Fleet Size	10%
2	Key Driver	Service Profile	60%
A	Secondary Driver	Number of Domestic collections per year	25%
B	Secondary Driver	Tonnage of Domestic waste per year	15%
C	Secondary Driver	Distance to the disposal site	15%
D	Secondary Driver	Trade Waste as a % of total waste	10%
E	Secondary Driver	Ancillary refuse collection services	5%
F	Secondary Driver	Method of domestic collection	15%
G	Secondary Driver	Waste recycling	10%
H	Secondary Driver	Transport	5%

This produced an initial list of seventeen authorities. It was felt that this was too large a group and in order to arrive at a more manageable body that each of the seventeen would be analysed in order to select the ten most appropriate authorities to form the study group. The most recently available Best Value Review (BVR) and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) reports relating specifically to Environmental Service Delivery were used to establish a range of performance ratings. More recent ratings for the proposed study authorities relate to services other than Environmental Services. For this reason the original ratings are considered more appropriate. At the same time the audit commission inspector interviews with service delivery staff were studied to identify any narrative related to empowerment and contribution. This exercise resulted in authorities with a range of performance ratings and a range of management styles. An additional authority was selected using the same criteria to act as the pilot.

Access

Once the study group size had been agreed it was necessary to negotiate access. The primary data source for the study relies heavily on not only gaining access to the organisations but also for a key officer within that organisation to co-ordinate the desired participants. Although this was ambitious the author had confidence in achieving this through contacts gained over the years in his work capacity. Initial contact was made by the author to two of APSE's principal research consultants. Following that meeting a formal introduction was made to each selected local authority with an outline of the proposed research and a request to participate. These introductions were followed up by the author in order to set up the interviews. Eight out of ten of the organisations were able to provide three officers to be interviewed. One at Service Head or Service Manager level, one at Supervisor level and one at operational level. Only two of the ten organisations could only provide two interviewees instead of the desired three on the day of the interviews. This gave twenty eight interviews which form the main data of the study. The personal contact was made with the most senior officer in each organisation. This put the onus on them to select suitable candidates for the supervisor and operative. This is a point worth stressing as the senior officer was in a position to be selective when choosing the additional officers. This could be of concern as it could bring into question whether those selected are representative of the organisation and able to provide reliable and valid data.

For this reason the information given to the contact officers was general and non specific. That way it would not be possible for any of those being interviewed to prepare or to be coached. Had all the interviews been extremely positive then it could question the reliability of the data. Access can therefore be considered in two parts, one being simple physical access and secondly access whereby you have negotiated a position where you can reveal the reality of what is occurring in relation to the research question and objectives. As a part time researcher working in the study area with known contacts some level of confidence can be given to the status of the data. None of this however can guarantee access. Organisations are very busy and in order to negotiate access the author ensured that the time required was kept a minimum. In this case approximately 30 minutes per interview. Also that the times would be when it suited the organisation. In practice this varied from early mornings, lunchtimes or at the end of the working day. The potential benefits to each organisation were given as access to a summary report on completion and the author has learned from experience that practitioners are keen to share best

practice and to learn from other peer groups. The promise of confidentiality and non attribution also helped to secure access. Care has been exercised by the author to ensure the participant authorities can not be readily identified from the interviews or the Audit Commission summaries. These assurances were given at the start of every interview and as these were all face to face and one on one interviews the author ensured he avoided overzealous questioning and pressing for a response as well as any possible leading questions. That type of questioning could make the situation unnecessarily stressful for the participant (Sekeran, 2000). It was also made clear to each interview participant that they had the right to decide whether or not to respond to any question (Cooper and Schindler, 1998). Each interviewee was asked for permission to have the interview recorded. Not one interviewee refused this request. The full transcript of every interview is included as appendix C. The author has however deleted any references which may have inadvertently enabled the individual or the local authority to be identified. Each interview was undertaken on a face to face as well as one to one basis which also encouraged full and open conversations to take place. Feng, (2007) argues that a more qualitative approach or an ethnographic approach to interviewing should not use the language of natural science, i.e. variables, controls, standardisation and so on but should see each interview as an opportunity to delve and explore precisely those subjective meanings that positivists seek to strip away. Hughes, (1976) proposes that this approach comes from the epistemology of constructionism and theoretical perspective of interactionism whereby interviewees are viewed as experiencing subjects who are purposeful, feeling, meaning-attributing, responding creatures who actively construct their social worlds.

This primary research was carried out throughout 2007-08 using the semi-structured interview approach with selected strategic informants delivering the service in the sample authorities as discussed. This is attached as Appendix B. Selected interview themes were used to develop an interview template. This was successfully piloted in a local authority prior to undertaking the formal study interviews. The interviews were conducted with three officers within the Environmental Services team at different reporting levels within the structure. On the day of the interviews authority B and K were only able to provide two interviewees. The table below shows the scale of the exercise by detailing the number of authorities selected and the number on interviews undertaken. The table also highlights where the reader can access the summary of secondary data for each participating authority as well as the location of each full interview transcription.

Target Number of Authorities	Ten
Actual Number of Authorities	Ten
Target Number of Interviews	Three per Authority Total Thirty
Actual Number of Interviews	Twenty Eight consisting of Eight x Three and Two x Two

Authority Ref	Secondary Data Summary Appendix Page	Interviewee Ref	Position in Organisation	Duration of Interview in minutes	Full Transcript Appendix Page
A	239	A1	Operations Manager	14.36	267
		A2	Collection Supervisor	22.12	269
		A3	Collector Driver	18.23	273
B	242	B1	Operation Manager	30.56	276
		B2	Operations Supervisor	16.55	280
C	244	C1	Service Manager	15.49	285
		C2	Supervisor	19.21	288
		C3	Operative	10.21	292
D	248	D1	Service Head	23.05	295
		D2	Environmental Services Manager	23.24	299
		D3	Contracts Operations Manager	26.12	302
E	251	E1	Street Care Manager	15.38	308
		E2	Street Cleaning Supervisor	12.56	310
		E3	Waste Collection Operative	11.34	312
F	254	F1	Operations Manager	18.42	315
		F2	Operations Supervisor	21.57	317
		F3	Street Scene Supervisor	20.59	321
G	256	G1	Service Manager	20.59	325
		G2	Operations Manager	20.49	328
		G3	Team Leader	10.44	331
H	259	H1	Service Head	15.47	334
		H2	Team Leader	16.48	336
		H3	Collector Loader	19.01	340
J	261	J1	Street Services Manager	16.56	344
		J2	Street Services Team Manager	20.39	347
		J3	Street Services Team Leader	17.26	350
K	263	K1	Waste Services Manager	31.11	353
		K2	Waste Services Supervisor	26.32	356

4.7 Case Study Approach

The research utilises case studies as the primary research technique. This form of using case(s) study, as a research strategy has been explored by (Eisenhardt, 1989 and 1991) and (Yin, 1984). The use of case study as a process for collecting empirical data for this study is consistent with the view of (Flick, 2002), who argues that traditional deductive methodologies relying on deriving research questions and hypotheses from theoretical models and testing them against empirical evidence

have started to fail in the differentiation process. Therefore case study has become a frequently used strategy for collecting empirical data in order to gain insight into local experience.

(Voss *et al*, 2002) proposes that questionnaires and models can have rigid limits whereas unconstrained case research can have very high impact, and lead to new and creative insights, development of new theory, and have high practitioner validity.

When “how” and “why” questions are being posed Yin, (1994) suggests that case studies are the preferred research strategy. The biggest advantage being the facility to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events including organisational and managerial processes.

Voss *et al*, (2002) suggests that case studies can be used for various research purposes including theory building.

4.8 Data Interpretation

Flick, (2002) proposes four approaches to data interpretation namely global analysis, thematic coding, theoretical coding and qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is considered the most appropriate for this study due to the semi-structured interview approach adopted.

Although the semi structural interview questionnaires followed specific themes they still produce a huge volume of transcript. Unlike quantitative data analysis, clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed. (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

Two strategies of analysis are eminent. Analytic induction and grounded theory. They are often described as iterative as they can be used following the collection of all data or can be viewed as strategies for the ongoing collection of data. Using analytic induction any deviant cases i.e. a case not confirming the hypothetical explanation are subject to further data collection or a reformulation of the original hypotheses. The strategy therefore seeks universal explanations of phenomenon by pursuing the collection of data until no deviant cases of a phenomenon are found.

Grounded theory differs in that it can be defined as theory that was devised from data systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. Two central features of grounded theory are that it is concerned with the development of theory out of data and the approach is iterative meaning that data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other.

The quantitative data acquired from inspection reports have been used to “match back” to the qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interviews. The data have been stored for analysis using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The author has chosen to utilise Nvivo 8 by QSR. This has been developed out of an earlier version of NUD*IST. The programme operates on a code and retrieve theme. The software allows for storage and retrieval of documents, memos and externals thus all relevant data both qualitative and quantitative can be stored in the one file. Although this software can retrieve on selected themes its primary function is one of folder access as opposed to data analysis. The author however considers the software does not facilitate a satisfactory level of codification of analytical procedures.

The relevant themes under consideration in the study are identified as, ambition performance, empowering, empowered, autonomy, control and performance measurement. NVIVO 8 enables these themes to be contained and coded using a built in code and retrieve theme. This facility allows the analyst to code text whilst working at the computer and to later retrieve the coded text. This can be used not only for the interview transcripts but also for the Audit Commission Inspection reports for each authority. Although this software does enable electronic filing and retrieval the interpretation and analysis in relation to the research question remains the prerogative of the researcher.

4.9 Research Summary

To summarise the epistemological position for this study is one of constructionism with a theoretical perspective of interpretivism. The methodology is one of case study using strategic informants. Primary sources of data have been collected through qualitative research through semi structured interviews. The business research strategy for this study is predominantly qualitative as a strategy that emphasises meanings rather than quantification. An inductive approach is taken to the relationship between theory and research in which the focus is placed on the generation of theories. The strategy rejects the practices and norms of the natural

scientific model and that of positivism in particular in which individuals interpret their social world. The strategy embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individual's creation. The inductive approach is considered most appropriate to the interpretivist stance adopted for this study. The data collected is predominantly qualitative involving semi structured interviews of a relatively small sample. For this reason the "theory follows the data" approach i.e. theory building rather than theory testing, is considered most relevant.

The case study approach in this project is seen as applicable to this stance as it looks to elicit culture-specific cognitions and to introduce a reference point for respondents so that the empirical information can be compared.

4.10 Pilot Study

Before embarking on collection of data from the ten selected authorities the author determined that a sample authority should be selected and used to test out the proposed methodology and the semi structured questionnaire. This was to prove invaluable particularly in respect to the sequence and wording of the questions. The key officers in the chosen pilot authority were known to the author in his role as researcher practitioner. This relationship brought about an honest and open debate and showed how particular phrases or questions could be innocently misinterpreted. The interviews from the pilot authority once transcribed gave an initial assessment of the data analysed against the AC rating: The most recent assessment of the Environmental Service delivery was undertaken in February 2003 where the AC found the Authority Waste Management service to be a good 2 star service that has promising prospects for improvement.

They found the borough's roads, streets and beaches to be predominantly free of litter and refuse with the overall satisfaction with refuse collection, street cleansing and recycling facilities as high. However the perception of all three interviewees is that they believe that the public are not getting a high standard of service. With regard to freedom to act the AC reported that "there are some staff who work to a rigid contract based specification which negates the most effective use of resources".

Although all of the interviewees feel they are empowered to some degree the way in which they state work is allocated comes across as prescriptive supporting the AC view. Two out of the three interviewees believe they are not working for a high performing and ambitious authority yet the council has a stated aim to "see a high quality physical environment that creates a positive image".

Obviously a much more detailed analysis is required however a snapshot of the data suggests that there is a desire to feel empowered and empowering with little supporting evidence being provided.

This council were unable to provide a front line operative to be interviewed on the day. This was unfortunate as it would have enabled a check to be made on whether the final step is being taken in this council.

The pilot study did allow the author to further refine the semi-structured interview questionnaire to remove any ambiguities and to focus purely on the research question prior to being rolled out. The pilot showed that the initially proposed interviews were taking between forty and fifty minutes. This was considered too long for the interviewer to expect from colleagues he knew and therefore too long to expect an officer he had not met before. It was decided to cut back the questions so that they could be fully answered within thirty minutes. The time taken for transcription was also a factor in this decision. The questionnaire was broken down into themes which would assist analysis whilst still ensuring the richness of data collected.

Following the pilot interviews it was necessary to adjust specific questions in order to ensure a common understanding. Question 2 F, for instance, initially read "How are you managed?" This question elicited a similar response from all three interviewees namely a description of the structure rather than the desired response regarding style. Questions 2 X & Y initially read as only one question "Is this best for you and the performance of your team?" The interviewees remarked that the response could vary between individual and team performance hence this was amended. The final question structure is attached at Appendix B.

4.11 Secondary Research

Secondary data by way of published assessments, surveys and official statistics are available from Government departments, through internet sites and through existing research. Much of this data will still be in "raw format" i.e. not analysed. (Saunders et al, 2003) describe secondary data as data that has already been collected for some other purpose. Documentary secondary data are often used in research projects that also use primary data collection. Such a combination is the preferred choice for this study. The metrics for this study are primarily available through

central government bodies or agencies on line. The literature review has also identified relevant sources of secondary data. Secondary data has huge advantages for researchers in that it can save in resource requirements time and money. (Ghauri and Gronhaugh, 2002). It is far cheaper to use secondary data than to collect new data. As a consequence the researcher generally has access to a far greater data set, particularly in relation to central government data. This leaves more time for analysis of the data. (Stewart and Kamins, 1993) suggest that secondary data is likely to be of a higher quality than a researcher could collect on their own. For this particular study secondary data in a standardised format has enabled a longitudinal study to be possible as well as providing comparable and contextual data for analysis. Providing data to compare against specific elements of the primary data has meant the author can place his own findings within a more general context. To some degree this has enabled the author to assess the generalisability of findings, in other words how representative these data are in relation to all local authority service providers. For other reasons why secondary data should be considered a serious alternative to collecting new data see (Dale, Arber, and Proctor, 1998). Secondary data however also has disadvantages as it will inevitably have been collected for a purpose that differs from the author's research question or objectives Denscombe, (1998). For this reason the researcher will generally require collection of more specific primary data in order to address the research question or objective. This study deals primarily with data from central government departments and agencies and should therefore be of a higher quality and in much greater depth than a lone researcher could produce. However this may not always be the case and in any event the content when analysed by political writers may have a particular "spin" attached to it. This is a distinct possibility when accessing on line content which is not subject to the same level of scrutiny as the unedited government report content. Accuracy and relevance of the secondary data to the research question is imperative as the use of inaccurate and irrelevant data will result in invalid answers, (Kervin, 1999). Bryman and Bell, (2003) also argue that a limitation of secondary data is the inevitable lack of familiarity with the data by the researcher particularly in relation to the range of variables, the ways in which those variables are coded, and aspects of the organisation of the data.

The research topic, in considering empowerment as a tool for enhanced public service performance, potentially allows the use of a wide range of secondary research sources. The majority of Audit Commission Inspection reports are freely available on line giving the author timely data on which to compare performance,

user satisfaction and direction of travel. This is supplemented by access to other sites including Local Government Association, IDOX Information Services, DCLG Communities, MORI, Association for Public Service Excellence, Chartered Management Institute, Local Authorities Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services, Local Government Information Unit, Economic and Social Research Council, Improvement and Development Agency, and Home Office Development and Practice Reports.

Underpinning literature has been a prime focus of the research combined with the ever changing political interventions into local authority organisation and ambition. This has enabled a review of theory to take place as well as a review of existing and changing performance within local authorities. Some research is also available in regard to perceived validity of 'real' performance. Drawing on 20 semi-structured elite interviews (Haubrich and McLean, 2006) reported that at times, CPA ratings and scores were regarded as not reflecting accurately an authority's performance, because it was felt that many good ideas could be learned from the badly performing authorities. As more studies take place it becomes an evolutionary process with data relevant to the research proposal becoming available throughout the life of the project. The metrics used to determine base line performance and improvement against this baseline were predominantly National & Local Performance Indicators. These targets are the metrics central government determined to utilise so it would naturally follow that officers involved in service delivery would concentrate on these targets as a measure of performance. Whether accomplishment of these targets is a true reflection of performance is the subject of debate and is covered in more detail in earlier sections of this study.

4.12 Limitations

In England there are currently some 238 district councils each delivering a wide range of services either in house or through partnership or contractual arrangements. Those authorities vary also in size, political makeup, structure and demographics. Each service will also have decided on a particular structure which they feel is best suited to delivery. In order to control quality and arrive at a defensible position the author has where possible utilised existing family groupings. The sample group has been judged to be sufficient for a research study of this nature.

4.13 Ethical Considerations

Consent and co-operation is required in the collection of data for any research proposal. This brings the following ethical issues and considerations into focus.

(Miles and Huberman, 1994)

- Informed consent - do the employees I wish to study have full information about the research, including why and how they have been chosen to participate? Is their consent freely given?
- Privacy - in what ways will the research intrude into people's privacy?
- Confidentiality and anonymity - how will the information be safeguarded?
- Use and misuse of results - do I have an obligation to ensure any findings are used appropriately, and not misused?

The group of employees it is proposed to involve directly in the research are peer group employees. This brings with it other issues such as:

- Honesty and trust - what is my relationship with the study group?
- Bias - I have a detailed operational knowledge of the groups involved in the study. Special care must be taken when undertaking any analysis to ensure that no personal bias is introduced.
- Reciprocity - what do the participants gain from my research?
- Intervention and advocacy - what do I do if I experience wrongful or illegal behaviour?

The contributions of all the people who collaborated and assisted with a project should be fully acknowledged and respect for intellectual property should also be maintained, and any knowledge drawn upon in producing the report should be attributed to those by whom it was first discovered. (Marshall, 1997). The problem here is that identifying one person by name could give clues to the identity of others in the sample, who do not wish to be named.

The following chapter sets out the metrics derived from the various assessment reports for each sample authority in tabular form. It also includes findings and views of the relevant Inspector where considered of relevance to the research question. Each summary is followed by analysis of the semi-structured interviews exploring the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy

and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this assessment period.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DATA AND FINDINGS

5.1 Analysis of Primary Research Data

The Audit Commission Inspection judgements of the ten chosen local authorities forming the primary research data group have been summarised in tabular format to give a brief description of the improvement journey they have each undergone. Key elements addressing the research question have been highlighted. The analysis of the key informant interviews follows each summary. The full transcripts are made available at Appendix C.

Authority A - Service Street Cleaning
<p>Inspection Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• September 2002 judged to be a “good” or two-star service which had promising prospects for improvement• Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2008 showed that the Council was now performing well and was judged as four-star• Annual Audit and Inspection Letter February 2008 stated that the Council was generally improving services in its priority areas, engaging well with local communities and making services more accessible with public satisfaction above average.
<p>Quality of service provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They found that the streets were clean and tidy throughout and this Service was provided at a reasonable cost;• There were clear departmental aims and challenging targets for service delivery and the Street Cleaning Service was aware of its role in delivering corporate objectives;• In the City centre, night-time cleansing plus litter picking throughout the day, along with regular removal of graffiti and fly-posting, meant that the area was clean throughout the day;• Fly tips were being cleared quickly as well as litter hot spots and overall satisfaction at this time was within the top 25 per cent of English authorities. <p>However</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some road gullies had not been cleaned for two years

- Abandoned cars, fly tipping and graffiti was found in one particular location, that had not been cleaned as well as alleyways that were overgrown and littered with broken glass and broken glass in parks. These were an eye-sore for people living nearby.
- Waste was apparent in front gardens where people either could not or would not either pay for its collection or take it to the Civic Amenity Site.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- The Inspectors also considered that there were parts of the Council that were not effectively working together and that impacted on the level of service.
- Regular performance monitoring was being used to help redirect resources to ensure that the Service remained responsive and the Service was found to have a good history of delivering service improvements.
- In regard to staff motivation they found them to be committed to delivering the improvements;
- The Inspectors found some examples of empowerment with the street cleaning crews working on patches and being responsible for keeping their own areas clean. There was no rigid cleaning schedule and areas were cleaned as and when required. The crews also removed some fly posting and graffiti when they came across it.
- Following on from the service review of 2002 the Inspectors made specific reference to an empowered workforce saying that staff felt free to try new ways of working.

Ambition

- The Council had a stated vision in 2002 to become a City where people would be proud to live; and a Council where people were also proud to work.

Managing Performance

- Regular performance monitoring was being used to help redirect resources to ensure that the Service remained responsive and the Service was found

to have a good history of delivering service improvements.

- A strong culture of performance management was developing at all levels with well embedded systems and processes holding services to account for their performance and helping to shift resources in line with priorities.

Summary

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Inspectors had identified examples of self-direction, accountability and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement. The Audit Commission's overall judgement in 2008 was that the service was improving well and they classified it as four stars in its level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This is a significant improvement on 2002 where the service was judged to be a 'good', two-star service that had 'promising' prospects for improvement.

Local Authority A Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows A1 is the Service Manager who line manages Supervisor A2 who in turn line manages Operative A3. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

All three employees have worked for this council for many years all working through the ranks to achieve their current role. The council had merged street scene services as part of a restructure and this had thrown together services that had previously worked in isolation. All described the key responsibilities in basic operational terms.

"Keeping the streets clean, Emptying the bins, Making sure the lads are doing what they should be."

In regards to service standards the Operations Manager stated that;

"We have local performance indicators. Rafts of them unfortunately"

He saw local indicators as somehow being his service standards and to refer to having to be judged against them as being unfortunate suggests that he was not entirely sold on the idea. When the Supervisor and Operative were asked what National and Local service standards they were working to they both replied “none” with the operative stating;

“Well they never actually set a sort of standard. They just expect you to work”.

Perception of the quality of service ranged from high to fair with the number of complaints being cited as the measure of performance. They all felt that this council was ambitious thus confirming the findings of the recent Audit Commission Inspection.

Looking at management styles the Operations Manager felt he was managed in an open and honest style. In addition to formal meetings and development appraisals there was a culture of informal operational reviews. Despite these arrangements he still felt that although he had the opportunity to put ideas forward that they were not always taken on board. This participation was a recent innovation and a welcome one.

“There was not enough say going in there. And I think now senior managers accept the need for both points of view going in there. I think they then decided to involve us more operationally. The guys who are actually going to be dealing with it.”

The Operations Manager had a good understanding of Empowerment and felt he was empowered by his line manager. He also felt he was empowering his teams and giving them freedom to decide how the work should be carried out.

“I believe that in order to be in a position to deliver the best service you have got to consider all the factors about that service. It is not just that one person says we will do this. It should be well let’s talk about why we should do this. It could be done better in another way”

“If there is a problem that needs sorting out I won’t tell them how they should do it. Unless they say I am not too sure what to do on this. But ultimately I will let them get on with it. We are open here at this Council. If someone says I don’t know what you mean they will say that. And that is the way it has got to be. I don’t want nodding dogs”.

"We are starting to cascade down through the organisation. Empowerment if you like. Making them more responsible. Then making them more accountable for their performance out there. That is something that is relatively new here".

These opinions would confirm the findings of the Inspectors who identified and reported examples of self-direction, accountability and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain improvement.

However although this culture was declared at Service Head and Operational Management level it was not so clear at the Supervisory or Operative levels. The Supervisor felt he was empowered and had a degree of freedom but with the caveat that he had parameters and needed to get approval first.

"Generally he will leave the running of the department to the Supervisors. If there is anything radical run it by them and see how they are with it".

"I don't think the job would be as beneficial if you did not have the freedom. You do need some parameters because it is open for people to take the piss but in general you do need a degree of freedom".

When it came to how he saw Empowerment in regard to his teams he saw it as merely increasing the responsibility.

"It's a matter of the responsibility you take on. And I feel that if I am to empower the lads and give them a little bit of responsibility it will make them perform better".

From the management courses he had attended in the council he described the management style as being directive however he was aware of other teams where they were left to their own devices. When asked what freedom he gave his teams in changing the way the work is undertaken he replied.

"Not a lot".

"There are rules and regulations that they need to follow and left to their own devices they will tend to take shortcuts".

"I came here with the approach if you give an instruction or get an instruction you follow it to the end. I have found out it is not quite how it works here but it has took a long time to get used to that. If you give an instruction to one of the lads and he refuses to carry it out your initial reaction is to dig your heels in and to follow it through. But sometimes it is better to stop and listen to

what he has to say as their argument may have merit. You can not just necessarily dig your heels in because you are higher up the food chain than he is”.

This directive approach certainly conflicts with the stated values of his line manager and the findings of the Inspectors in regard to participative decision making and freedom to act within this council. The Inspectors reported examples in this particular service of self managing teams with street cleaning crews working on patches and being responsible for keeping their own areas clean. However in regard to self managing and being responsible for quality felt it was his job still to:

“As part of our job we have to go out and monitor. It’s my job to go out and monitor what they have already done, and where they have been and where they haven’t. Just making sure they are doing it correctly and making sure they are behaving themselves”.

This directive non inclusive style was confirmed to a large degree by the operative who had not come across the term Empowerment but when given a definition felt he was not empowered in any way. He described some major fundamental proposals to amend the way his work would be structured and undertaken in the future and his frustration that none of the workforce had been involved in the discussion process. When asked whether he felt he would be consulted before implementation he replied:

“I don’t think there will be any negotiating. They make the decisions. We just have to follow them”.

He felt the only avenue to get an idea raised was the formal grievance procedure and when asked if he and his colleagues had a good idea what he thought would be the biggest barriers to getting those changes made he replied;

“It would just depend if the managers were willing to accept it or not. At the moment the managers have all changed. We used to have managers you could go and talk to before. But the managers now want to say what goes now”.

This Council has shown significant and sustained improvements from 2002 to date. The Inspectors report a strong culture of performance management at all levels yet two key levels in the organisation were unable to relate to any service standards at all. The Inspectors also report empowerment being used as a management tool to deliver and sustain improvement. Although the Operations Manager and his line

manager felt this was the case it was not evident at Supervisor or Operative level with a non-inclusive and directive approach being the stated culture.

Authority B – Street Care Service

Inspection Summary

- December 2002 judged a **“Good” or two-star service** which **had promising prospects for improvement.**
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment in May 2004 found the Council was now judged to be **Excellent.**
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter March 2008 stated that the Council had made good progress in relation to its top priorities.

Quality of service provision

- The quality of the service to residents had improved over the past twelve months and overall the streets were clean.
- The service did not compare favourably with other Councils in 1999/2000. However, since that inspection the situation had improved.
- The Council had a clear corporate purpose and aims.
- There were clear service aims that reflected the corporate purpose.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- Removal of the client/contractor split had allowed the Council to react quicker to service requests and respond to customer complaints. It had also helped to improve staff morale as they considered that they now get a quicker response to suggestions they put forward to management. However despite this statement appearing to support an empowering culture the Inspectors also found evidence that the service was still working to schedules set up during the time of CCT.
- In 2004 the Inspectors found that the leadership and management style was now considered more open with systems in place to ensure that different participants could learn from each other's experiences.
- The Council had an open leadership and management style that positively promoted the active exchange of ideas and information. The Council encouraged innovation by introducing a staff ideas scheme called “Bright Ideas”.
- A recent staff survey showed that staff had a high level of satisfaction with their work.

Ambition

The Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2001/2002 described the Council's ambition as:

- Ensuring that this is a good place to live, work and visit, so everyone can enjoy a good quality of life.
- In 2004 aims were again considered to be ambitious with priorities reflecting the national agenda as well as dealing with issues important to local people

Managing Performance

- In regard to performance management the Inspectors found that both Councillors and officers were clear about the corporate priorities and their roles and responsibilities for performance improvement in key areas.
- Performance of the Council as measured by Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) had continued to improve from an already high level of performance. In addition, the proportion of PIs that had improved over both one year and three years placed the Council amongst the best performing district councils in the country. This indicated that the Council was sustaining improvement relative to its own performance in previous years and was improving at a faster rate than other councils over the short and the longer term.

Summary

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement. The Council had moved from a **Good" or two-star service** which had **promising prospects for improvement in 2002** to an **Excellent Council** in 2004. The council had an open leadership and management style that positively promoted the active exchange of ideas of information. In relation to national priorities, most of the Council's services were now performing well in comparison to other district councils, and performance indicators had continued to improve from an already high level of performance. The community's perception of Council services was found to be generally positive. Public realm improvements had been achieved.

Local Authority B Interview Transcript analysis

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows B1 is the Service Manager who line manages Supervisor B2. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C. The Authority was unable on the day to put forward a front line operative to take part in the interviews.

Both Employees have been with this Authority for more than fifteen years so were present throughout all of the Audit Commission assessments and judgements.

They both considered they were responsible for ensuring performance levels were okay with the Supervisor stating he would be responsible for any mistakes that were made as well as any other failings. In relation to standards of service and performance management they were aware of the relevant National Performance Indicators however the manager in particular placed a great deal of emphasis on the number of complaints as a measure of performance without any analysis of improving the process to ensure the complaints were not repeated. The operational processes were therefore creating "failure demand". Failure demand is demand caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer, (Seddon, 2003) Freedom from Command and Control.

The work processes were target driven.

"We have got quite stringent standards in relation to government standards and performance indicators but we have our own service standards which we tie in to corporate aims. An example would be, we would say missed bins for example we would endeavour to collect within 24 hours, we have a range of service standards that we adhere to."

The Audit Commission inspectors commented on this stating that this service was still working to schedules set up during the time of CCT which was resulting in streets being cleaned according to the schedule, when they were already at a high or acceptable standard.

Despite working to the same agreed standards and having access to the same management information only the Supervisor felt they were delivering a high

standard of service. The manager again was reliant on the volume of complaints as his measure of quality service.

"I deal with the men and because I deal with all the complaints and all the requests and things like that"

In May 2004 the Comprehensive Performance Assessment found the council to be Excellent. They also commented that the leadership style was now considered more open with systems in place to ensure that different participants could learn from each other's experiences. When asked if they felt they were working for an ambitious and high performing authority the Supervisor made reference to this change in attitude.

"Very – certainly in the last 3 or 4 years, having spent a lot of years in the authority you can see a definite change in emphasis in moving forward."

The manager was also aware of the Audit Commission judgement.

"High performing definitely. We have got the excellent CPA rating"

The Supervisor felt the authority was strongly led by the Chief Executive and the recent removal of a tier of management had also been a contributory factor in the turnaround. When asked to describe the style of management of his line manager he responded by saying;

"He does empower people. He does like to have confidence in the people who he is working with and for. He is not a shouter; he's not that kind of guy"

This was much preferred as he had managers in the past that were either too laid back or much too strict. When the same question was asked of the manager he felt he was able to make the majority of decisions without reference up to his line manager.

"He is more than happy for me to make as many decisions as I need to. Things that I think I need to let him know about I let him know but basically I think he trusts my judgement."

Surprisingly though he was unhappy with this style of management as he felt he was too far removed from the decision making process and wanted to be more

involved. Whether he wanted confirmation from his manager that his judgement was appropriate or whether he felt his manager was not empowering but abdicating was difficult to determine. He said all of his tasks were just hundreds of five minute tasks and he was not getting the opportunity to input into the bigger picture. This approach however appeared to be the way in which he managed the supervisor who felt he was just allowed to get on with it. The manager felt he should be out supervising more which could suggest that he was not confident of the actual supervisors or operatives being able to work with a high degree of autonomy. The supervisor was however happy to get on with the work relying on his manager to be more of an enabler.

“Because of his style in relation to your core work he does let you get on with it. He is there as a support mechanism in some respect where if you are having a blockage with other sections or a certain tier of management which you need to clear, so that you can get the target achieved, he will step in and help.”

When the manager was asked to comment on the relationship between the way he is managed and the effect on performance he confirmed a view expressed by the Audit Commission Inspectors by referring to dealing with the client side of the service. Even at this stage some four years after the Inspection there was still the CCT mentality at this level of management within the operations. Whether the message had not been conveyed formally that a more integrated approach was now the way forward or whether it was just too big a step was difficult to determine. This was a repeated conflict between his desire to supervise and the organisational shift to a more open and autonomous way of working. This was reinforced when asked how much of his work he felt he could influence. He stated that 95% was pre determined and he was unhappy that he could no longer exert control over the direct operations.

“I think staff were aware that I could turn up at any location at any minute but now I am just chained to my desk doing everything on the phone which isn’t good.”

Looking at empowerment both officers had come across the term. The supervisor had a clear understanding of empowerment and felt he was empowered. The manager also understood the principle but felt it was more to do with taking on some of his manager’s duties and empowering people to supervise rather than to give freedom to operate.

During a recent inspection the inspectors found evidence of self managing clean teams and hit squads which had helped to achieve significant improvements in the street scene with street cleanliness seeing an improvement from 93% to 96%. These teams also responded instantly to complaints from residents. The supervisor is in the most appropriate place in the structure to enable this and this particular supervisor held regular formal and informal consultation and made him self available without interfering in the actual operations.

“Again I think it is a case of having confidence in the people who are doing that area of work. I don’t feel it is necessary to tread on their toes unless they ask or unless there is a particular issue.”

He understood the need for role clarity and also that the appropriate skill set was necessary for this approach to be successful.

“Well because I am a great believer in that if you have the right people in the right roles with the necessary skills to carry out their activities. I would have thought you won’t be needing to involve yourself too much. That’s my style if you like”.

“Well, if you are talking about front line service I think it is to oil the wheels. It is to keep things flowing both ways. You have got to provide the front line people with the tools to do the job well. The physical resources and the machinery, and I think you have got to have this understanding that you are working with them, alongside them and you are not working against them. It is all in the same direction.”

The manager however when asked to comment on the style of management and relationship between freedom to act and performance commented.

“I don’t think it is best for anyone really. I think a manager who is more involved and more keeping an eye on making some standards are being maintained and constantly mentioning things. I think that would be a better result for the service and for the team. Better for me possibly not but I would sooner have a manger that was more interested and more involved in day to day matters and what was going off and constantly reminding people of quality standards and things like that. I think that would be better for the service and for the teams and for everyone really.”

He had attended the management development training with a theme of involving all in the decision making process and being open however it would appear it had not struck a chord with him. This despite the following comments;

“Basically managing with everyone feeling they were involved in the decision making process. So if everyone has taken away from that course the same as I did then whenever there is a decision to be made they would speak to the operators who generally more often than not are the experts in that field.”

The manager did not feel the teams had much freedom to act and again referred to a schedule of work and streets where they had to be twice a day.

In summary the inspectors found this authority to be high performing in relation to this particular service. They made specific reference to an open leadership and management style. They found self managing teams. It was a council that encouraged innovation by introducing a staff ideas scheme called bright ideas. Performance indicators had continued to improve from an already high level of performance. It was showing sustained improvement and was improving at a faster rate than other councils over the short and long term. The supervisor interviewed had a clear understanding of empowerment and had a clear understanding of how to introduce such an initiative to bring about results. The manager interviewed however seemed to be reluctant to let go of the historic client / contractor role. When asked if he felt the facility for freedom to act was good for the service his response was;

“A little bit of freedom is good but too much freedom you can soon end up not having the control. I feel as a manager or supervisor, you have got to feel that you have got some kind of control and that is not being a sort of control freak or trying to bully people you just feel if you are taking the flack from above so you need to know things are getting done the way you think they should be done or in a manner that is acceptable”

He was quite happy to declare that he did not empower his teams yet when asked what he considered to be the main purpose of management he commented;

“I also think as a manager we have got to – you have got to ensure – your staff are the most important commodity of anything – you have to ensure staff have some involvement in the way things are done”

It could be argued that the performance improvements here are due to the approach of the level of management closest to the front line, the supervisor. The fact that the manager did not empower the supervisor to any degree has not stopped the supervisor empowering his teams with a positive effect. The manager was frustrated that he did not find time to visit the front line to exert control. Perhaps just as well?

Authority C - Service Parks and Open Spaces

Inspection Summary

- December 2001 judged a **“fair” or one-star service** which **would probably improve**.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 showed that the Council was now judged to have **promising** prospects for improvement.
- The Council was assessed as Good in the latest Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter March 2008 stated that the Council had a clear and ambitious vision for the city. It was found to be moving forward in all of its corporate priority areas with good progress.

Quality of service provision

- Some prestige parks were maintained to a good standard and were well presented;
- Play areas that had been refurbished were to a good standard;
- The standard of maintenance in other parks, recreation grounds and amenity areas was not as good;
- Some play areas were poor;
- Security, vandalism, dog fouling and litter were problems that needed to be resolved.
- 76 per cent of people were satisfied with the parks maintenance
- Customer satisfaction for parks and open spaces was average when compared to neighbouring authorities and with the whole of England.
- Public spaces were found to be generally free from litter accumulations
- In 2008 it was improving performance in national priorities with 61 per cent of national performance indicators improved which was above the average for district councils.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- Front line staff showed obvious commitment to the service and to customers;
- More recently appointed operational staff may not have the skills to deliver the required standards;
- The service was establishing new working practices to improve grounds

<p>maintenance and the maintenance of buildings and paths;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inspectors found that some managers were resistant to change • Working under an area supervisor they would have autonomy to deliver the service in the best way possible in accordance with a performance specification. • In 2005 Staff had become more customer focused and were committed to improvement. • In 2005 Staff morale was now considered to be good as opposed to low three years previously. Survey results indicated staff felt trusted and empowered to do their jobs, and to make decisions.
<p>Ambition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council had set its vision in 2001 as ‘a place where people aspired to live, enjoy working and loved visiting’ and the Council was ambitious with a mission statement to “work with a sense of pride”. • In 2005 had an overall aim in its three-year corporate plan is to be an ‘excellent’ council.
<p>Managing Performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service was delivered in accordance with a frequency-based specification, with a limited number of defined standards. • In 2005 the Inspectors stated that the Council appeared to be less active in exploring alternative ways of providing its services
<p>Summary</p> <p>In summary from 2001 to 2008 the Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Inspectors had identified examples of self-direction and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement.</p>

Local Authority C Interview Transcript analysis

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of

reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows C1 is the Service Manager who line manages Supervisor C2 who line manages Operative C3. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C

The Service Manager has been with this Council for ten years and has therefore been an influencing factor during the inspection time table under consideration. He sees his key responsibilities as being

“to make the authority cleaner and greener, simple as that, and I fit in there by making sure that there is efficient use of resources that we have to enable that”.

Well aware of the main Best Value Indicators applicable to the role and had a strong focus on the need to score well with the caveat that

“I can’t think it necessarily gives you anything useful but everyone is using it”.

The measures had become targets in his mind. When asked if he thought the public were getting a high standard of service he responded by referring to the results of the most recent BVUSS BV82 score. Although that survey gives the public’s perception he was happy to accept that as his view on the quality of the service. In this Council it had only risen from 50% satisfaction to 52% satisfaction over three years. He commented on this low score and small rise by saying “you’re not likely to improve as the better the place is looking the more likely they are to complain”. He did however feel that he was working for an ambitious authority. The Supervisor has also worked here during the inspection period. He felt his key responsibilities

“were to deploy staff in the different areas to the jobs that need doing on that day. Then I monitor it”

. In regard to standards of service he made no reference to Central Government criteria merely that he must keep the streets clean and then monitors the work. If there were problems he would report them up the line. He felt the public were getting a high standard of service and based this not on any metrics but on the number of formal complaints he had to deal with. In his view the fewer complaints he received then the better the quality of the service was. He was also certain that he was working for an ambitious authority. The Operative has also been with this

Council since 2002. He also saw his key responsibilities as just to keep the streets clean. When asked if he was working to any laid down standards that would identify how clean the streets were he remarked that he gets a brief description of the duties and his work is checked. He is the man on the front line and in his view he felt that the public were not getting a high standard of service. When asked what makes him say that he said he gets

“an awful lot of complaints, more complaints than compliments”.

He did not know if he was working for a high performing and ambitious authority.

When asked how they were managed and how work was allocated to them the Service Manager felt he had a fairly free hand to do as he wished within boundaries and was free to come up with ideas. He described it as a non prescriptive style. Work was being allocated to him through a formal structure but still very informally. This style of being managed was his usual experience. The Supervisor described the way he was being managed by the Service Manager as being

“able to make quite a few decisions but he does give us lots of things. He seems to get complaints and passes them on to us to deal with”.

When asked if he was a different type of manager than he was used to he responded by saying yes and that

“he sticks to the book, the rules, you know he can only do certain things and certain ways of doing them”.

Work was being allocated to him by E-mails, radios and mobile phones which he felt was an effective method. The Operative felt his Supervisor gave him freedom,

“In my job I have lots of freedom”.

However when asked how work is allocated to him he responded by saying

“It’s written down in a book, and each day I follow it. It is pretty much the same day in day out”.

When asked if he felt this style of management and work allocation was effective he answered by saying that

“Well I have a lot of flexibility. I mean if I see a problem as I am driving from one job to another, I can just go and see to it. It’s not a problem”.

The Service Manager felt he had the opportunity to put his ideas forward and that suggestions were welcomed and tried out

“if they were any good”.

The Supervisor also felt his suggestions were welcomed and tried out but needed the approval of the Service Manager first and the Operative said if he had any ideas or suggestions he would seek approval from the Supervisor prior to implementation. They would be tried out if the Supervisor thought they were sensible. All three felt they could introduce new ways of working but all three needed referral and approval from their line manager prior to implementation.

The Service Manager was aware of the term empowerment and from his personal view felt he was empowered to influence the way things operate within his section but not the authority. He considered he was being empowered and preferred to have some influence in the way the work was carried out. Neither the Supervisor nor the Operative had come across the term empowerment. When a brief definition was given to the Supervisor and asked if he felt empowered he responded by saying

“Yeah – I think we’ve got a bit of that to be honest with you. If we do want to change something obviously we will run it past the Service Manager and then he says Yay or Nay.” (Yes or No).

The Operative was also given a brief definition of empowerment and said he was allowed to make quite a lot of decisions but was unable to offer any recent examples. He preferred to have some of his work spelled out for him as well as having some say in the way his work was carried out.

The Service Manager allocates work to the Supervisors as well as other key officers. This is generally verbal with a reliance on e-mail. When asked whether he felt it was his responsibility to decide how work should be carried out he disagreed stating that

“there is a lot of freedom to do whatever you want”.

Every month he leads team meetings where he ensures staff

“Know where they are going, so that they are involved in the decisions of the whole department”.

When asked what freedom he feels he gives his team in changing the way the work is carried out he responded by saying that

“there is quite a lot of freedom to do that”. However this was countered by also remarking that “Although if it does influence procedures and practices that have been done for some time they do have to check to ensure that it doesn’t affect everything else. They do tend to feed back through me. They are quite responsible in that way”.

This in some way reinforces the assumption that any new way of working needs higher level approval before it can be introduced. Whilst accepting this as procedure the Service Manager still considered that he was an empowering manager and encouraged

“a lot of freedom”.

The Supervisor who was responsible for allocating work to the street cleaning teams had a somewhat different take on this claiming that the monthly meetings had yet to be introduced by the Service Manager. The Service Manager was planning to introduce area working but there was uncertainty as to how it would operate in practice. When asked if he had the opportunity to provide input he said he would be able to when the meetings took place. He had concerns that the proposals were already predetermined and that his views would not be taken on board. This theme was followed up by asking whether if at the meeting all of the Supervisors had a consensus view which differed from the Supervisor’s view would he listen and back down. He said

“I don’t think so, no. It’s an idea he wants to run with I think we will be trying it.”

The Operative had already stated that he felt the Supervisor gave him a lot of autonomy

"In my job I have lots of freedom".

However this was not apparent from the Supervisor perspective as when asked how he passed work down to the staff he responded by stating that

"We organise them, we give them what is called a section map for each day. They have an area to complete in that day. We give these out every day."

This was followed up by asking who he felt was responsible for the work, was it up to them to see it is done right or is it up to you? This brought an unexpected response

"Well they know we are going to be checking so they have to do it. If we are not happy then we send them back. If we find an area that is not up to what we want doing then obviously we will instruct them to go back and do it again. We check it you see through the day".

This is a description of a command and control style yet when reminded of our previous discussion around empowerment and the accepted definition of empowerment and asked whether he felt he empowered his workforce he replied

"Personally, I think I do, Yeah."

There was no formal process to involve his staff in decision making and no formal meetings. When asked if he did feel he gave them any freedom in the way work is done he felt he did however it was accepted that any ideas had to run past him for approval before they could try them out.

The Operative was asked if he was happy in the way he was being managed and also if there was anything he would change in that regard. He replied by saying

"No I am given a lot of freedom".

This question was slightly rephrased by asking whether there was anything he would change in the structure that would improve performance? Particularly the way your managers manage? Do you think they have much effect on the work outside? Expecting him to reinforce his belief that he is given

"a lot of freedom"

he responded that

"I don't think they do really. It's a set way of working."

When each level of management was asked what they felt was the prime purpose of management the Service Manager responded by stating that it was

"To do the jobs that nobody else wants to do. To make the ultimate decisions, to make the more difficult decisions I suppose" To make the final decision on whether somebody is sacked."

The Supervisor however felt the main purpose of management was;

"to get a job done to the best of your ability. Without a management structure nobody is going to do anything are they? "

He then reinforced his apparent belief that his staff can not really be trusted to do a good job in isolation by saying *that*

"If they are not going to be checked they will just do what they want".

No manager put forward the view that managers should be leading, enabling, or facilitating success.

When asked if there was anything he would change in the way he was currently managed that would improve performance the Service Manager said he would prefer his line manager to spend more time with him to

"check over and ensure that we are going down the strategic route".

When asked if there was anything he would change in the way he manages that would improve performance he responded by saying that he wished he could spend more time with his staff to make them feel more involved and comfortable with what they were doing. When the same questions were put to the Supervisor he responded by saying that they should

"have more meetings and more discussions and look at different ways. But everyone is too busy."

His main issue was that of limited resources however not it would appear on the front line

“You could do with more supervision”

By all accepted measures the Environmental Services team within this authority has delivered a sustained improvement in performance over many years. The Inspectors have specifically identified examples of autonomy and empowerment being used as a management tool to deliver that improvement.

The interviews do not however paint a picture of a consistent and structured approach to this style of working. Standards do not appear to be fully understood. Approval from above before anything new is tried is considered as having freedom to act. Daily monitoring of standards of workmanship is considered to be empowering. Decisions can be made within undefined boundaries but still need prior approval. There was no evidence of empowerment being embedded nor even clearly understood. Contradictory remarks support that even when staff are being told exactly what to do, being closely monitored and given formal instructions

“It’s written in a book, and each day I follow it. It is pretty much the same day in day out”. They still feel

“ Well I have a lot of flexibility”.

“In my job I have lots of freedom”.

Authority D – Street Scene Services

Inspection Summary

- May 2002 judged a **“fair” or one-star service** which **had uncertain prospects for Improvement**
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2004 showed that the Council was now rated as **good** with a range of environmental services performance indicators scoring **three out of a maximum of four**.
- The Council was assessed as **performing adequately** in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of December 2005.
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter March 2008 stated that the Council was **improving well**.

Quality of service provision

- The Council was found to be under performing in waste minimisation and recycling. Recycling performance was weak and recycling targets had been missed, the waste stream continued to grow albeit at a slower rate over the past two years and waste minimisation was yet to be formulated into a published plan;
- The Council was not keeping streets and open land clean and free from litter.
- Comparative performance showed a mixed picture but improvement was slow and in recycling not improving at the same rate as other councils.
- The Council had a clear vision and aspirations for the city's environment in its corporate priorities and key actions. Services had incorporated these aims into plans and performance management systems;
- Six new rapid response cleansing teams were operational;
- The Council's strategies showed clear commitment to improve services that impacted on the street scene and local quality of life;
- Street scene had remained a clear and consistent priority for three years and the Council were aware of what mattered to local people;
- The Council was developing capacity in street cleaning services through changes to working methods, new staff, developing local facilitation and

targeted investment;
<p>Employee attitude and autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council had some way to go to remove inefficient working practices and release capacity to frontline service improvements. • The Delivering Safer, Stronger and Greener Communities Service Inspection undertaken in 2008 saw the Council aiming to empower people and communities, by increasing participation in local decision making and influencing service delivery and to have cleaner, safer and greener public places. • The Council was developing capacity in street cleaning services through changes to working methods, new staff, developing local facilitation and targeted investment; • The Council was finding difficulty in convincing staff of the ability to deliver improvement through doing things in a different way. Despite having made a clear commitment in 2003 to removing the artificial barriers associated with operating under the old compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) regime, some staff were still reluctant to let go of the CCT culture and practices. • Despite a move to remove the artificial client/consultant/contractor split within the street scene services, the Council still had some way to go to remove inefficient working practices. The Council was still operating with internal trading accounts. This input based delivery model was not conducive to innovative working practices.
<p>Ambition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The long-term vision and ambition as set out in the area's community strategy and shared with the Council in its corporate plan was specified as; <i>'Making this a better place for all to live, learn, work and enjoy'.</i>
<p>Managing Performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance information was seen to be being reported regularly to members and senior officers with some innovative approaches being used in some areas to manage performance. The approach across the Council

however was not consistent.

- Whilst corporate and service aims and objectives were clearly set out and understood by managers, in talking to staff and supervisors the Inspectors found that these were not consistently known or understood. In some areas team objectives were understood but not how they fitted with other teams or elements of the service. The Inspectors felt this inconsistency in understanding could possibly lead to inefficiency with teams not contributing to each others success.
- In 2007 the Council was reporting on performance measures focusing on the cleanliness of streets and open spaces Cleanliness of streets and open spaces had improved. This was verified by independent inspections commissioned by the Council.

Summary

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had moved from a **fair** to a **good** to **performing adequately** to end up as **improving well**. The Audit Commission's overall judgement was that the Council was improving well and had now been classified as **three stars** in its current level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Overall improvement in key service areas for the year 2006/07 had been good. The Inspectors found a good overall level of improvement in the Council's priority of achieving safer, stronger, cleaner and greener communities. Public satisfaction with the cleanliness of public spaces had improved.

Local Authority D Interview Transcript analysis

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows D1 is the Head of Service who line manages the Service Manager D2 who manages the Operations Manager D3. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C

All three employees have been with this Authority prior to 2002 so were present throughout all of the Audit Commission assessments and judgements.

Both the Head of Service and the Service manager considered their roles to be strategic as well as being involved in operational matters such as service delivery re-design. They saw Government Best Value Indicator targets as being the standards they should concentrate on. The Operations Manager did not identify with a strategic role but did relate to national performance indicators although he felt they were too numerous to mention. They all felt the citizens were getting a good standard of service and that they were working for an ambitious and high performing authority. Both the Head of Service and the Service Manager made specific reference to the positive role the Chief Executive was playing in driving the authority forward. The Head of Service felt he had a high degree of freedom to act however he put some of this down to the fact that his line manager had limited experience in this particular service so was possibly not confident in proposing changes. He made his line manager aware of any proposed changes then just worked with his teams to implement them. The Service Manager referred to The Head of Services as;

“one of the best if not the best manager to work for. He is very open, he is very forward thinking, he lets you make decisions and he also is radical in his approach. He allows a blank paper approach, which is my style anyhow”.

The Operations Manager referred to the Service Manager as being very open and when asked if he got the opportunity to put new ideas forward he replied;

“Yes, yes definitely, there are things that I have done to improve the service that I have put forward and have gone ahead. An example of that is probably the waste permit scheme.”

The authority was judged to be fair in 2002 and good in 2004. In 2005 they were considered to be performing adequately. They found some innovative approaches being used to manage performance though this was not found to be consistent across the Council as a whole. A consistent theme however during the inspections was a difficulty in convincing staff of the ability to deliver improvements through doing things in a different way. Despite a clear commitment in 2003 to removing the artificial barriers associated with operating under the old CCT regime some staff were still reluctant to let go of those out dated practices and culture. They also felt the Council still had a long way to go to remove inefficient working practices and were operating to an input based delivery model which was not conducive to innovative working practices.

The interviews with the Head of Service, the Service Manager and the Operations Manager took place in late 2007 and there was still evidence of this attitude remaining. The Operations Manager reported that;

“Between myself and the managers under me then there are things that need to improve. There is a lot of old local authority mentality in there. Not just old local authority it’s the worst case scenario you’ve got old local authority and old refuse collection mingled into one. I’m a moderniser me, I like to improve things and move things forward and there are some people that don’t like that”.

The Head of Service also commented;

“We effectively were the client contractor combined and a lot of the staff were ex DSO from years ago and it was pretty evident that there was a complete vacuum of management approach or leadership and a lot of people were very switched off. A lot of those people are now gone. I like to think that a lot of the staff we have got left are/do feel more empowered than they ever were before.”

All three officers had come across the term empowerment and they all gave a clear definition as well as saying they were all being empowered as well as all empowering their teams. All three credited the recently appointed Chief Executive with this empowering approach to management.

“The direction the Chief exec is taking now is more of an empowering, take decisions take responsibility type of role that what is directing us to do.”

“I think it is becoming to be an authority wide strategy. When I first came here it probably wasn’t but with the new Chief Exec he’s got a management style of, you know, your there to do the job, you do the job, if anything goes wrong, you know, there is no blame culture allegedly”.

The need to have engaged employees was highlighted by the Head of Service. Some staff he inherited from the CCT days held different values and without positive engagement any thoughts of empowering would not prove to be successful.

“But you have got to get the right staff in the team who can take than on willingly. Some of the staff I have inherited in the past would just run a mile. They wanted everything directing, putting on a plate now that’s not the way to manage it now they have retired or moved on. We have got people now who are keen to take the challenge on.”

The Head of Service is adopting a policy of empowerment and once the corporate direction is agreed he is happy to use the skills and innovation of his teams to personalise the service delivery. The Audit Commission Inspectors in their delivering safer, stronger and greener community's service inspection reported that the Council was aiming to empower people and communities, by increasing participation in local decision making and influencing service delivery. This devolvement was developing with services being delivered in five neighbourhoods. The Service Head had some concerns that central control and central standards was losing way to having possibly five different sets of standards.

"It is a peculiar one at the moment because we re devolving services now with managers so it is unique. I think the central control and the central standards setting, the central lead and the central direction of perhaps those services has gone adrift since they have gone down to five neighbourhoods. My concern is that we are going to have five different services operating to five different standards and whilst neighbourhoods have their own unique requirements and they should be differentiated the overall standard of service that we provide, the service offered to the public should still be maintained. So I just feel we have got a bit of an issue there."

The Service Manager had no doubts that by being empowered by his manager and by empowering his teams the service would benefit as well as the workforce.

"As I said I empower them, I give them responsibility and expect them to come up with the goods. And if they need any assistance I will guide them. But I certainly don't expect to make their decisions for them. I expect them to make decisions – reasoned decisions so they are working to our key aims and objectives. This is relatively new to some of the managers I have got and they take a bit of getting used to my style of management. I think they like it yeah, they certainly like it."

"They like the responsibility, they like making decisions even if they are minor decision. Before that somebody else, in this office actually, would have made the decision for them."

The Operations Manager was concerned that not all employees were engaged or willing to embrace the empowerment philosophy. He quoted several examples of occasions where service delivery decisions were being made by the crews without the need for prior approval. He did however also make reference to certain issues that had yet to be overcome. When asked about these barriers he responded by saying;

“There is a lot of old local authority mentality. I come across it on a regular basis. I think the gates are open but there are still some dinosaurs plodding around the plot”.

When asked if he thought people can change he replied;

“I think some of them should be moved on. I know it is cruel to say but in a lot of local authorities, even in this one, and this is quite a modern authority, in some of the authorities I have worked in some of the officers have been complete dinosaurs. You know, we’ve done it this way for years and there’s no reason to change it. They take the attitude if it ain’t broken don’t fix it.”

In summary this Authority has shown sustained improvement in service delivery. The Annual Audit and Inspection letter of March 2008 found the Council to be improving well. The constant theme throughout the inspections was the input based delivery model and the difficulties arising from an artificial client/contractor role. The introduction of a new Chief Executive with a new vision and a belief in empowerment was beginning to filter through the layers of management to where it can make a difference. There was still evidence however that not all staff had embraced this philosophy and were not engaged in the process. The negative impact of those individuals was not being adequately addressed which was impacting on the ability of progressive managers to move the organisation forward.

Authority E – Care and Maintenance Of The City

Inspection Summary

- July 2003 judged a **“fair” or one-star service** which **had uncertain prospects for improvement**.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment October 2004 judged that the Council was now **Fair towards Good**.
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter April 2008 stated that the Council was found to be **continuing to improve** from a generally low performance base.
- However at that time in regard to **Street care performance had continued to improve**, although the Council's **comparative performance was still weak**.

Quality of service provision

- The service had good links to the council's overall priorities, and one of the council's six core policies includes a safe, clean and pleasant city.
- Service delivery was good in several areas, including refuse collection, cemeteries and crematoria, highway maintenance and car parks.
- Comparative performance and residents' satisfaction was good for refuse collection, although the amount of waste collected was high.
- There were a large number of aims and ambitions that were not clearly focused or prioritised, and many of the targets were not specific or sufficiently measurable.
- There were few service standards, these were not being communicated to staff, and residents' and customer information and feedback was also not well developed.
- Actions to raise awareness and to educate residents of the need to reduce littering were limited.
- Service delivery for parks and public toilets was considered poor, and residents' satisfaction was also low for these service areas.
- The street cleaning service had low levels of residents' satisfaction, and the service had many areas of weakness, although there had been some recent improvements.

- The council's performance declined in most of the national performance indicators for the service between 2000/01 and 2001/02.
- The Inspectors concluded that service quality and delivery was variable. Some services performed well, such as highway maintenance, refuse collection, cemeteries and crematoria, and others less well, such as the street cleaning, parks and public toilet services.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- Interviews undertaken by the Inspectors revealed weaknesses with internal communications and some poor cross-department working and sharing of ideas.
- The council had successfully obtained Investors in People (IIP), and staff appraisals were being undertaken across many areas of the service. Some staff told the Inspectors that although they had appraisals, they were not always linked to performance.
- By 2004 however the Inspectors felt the managing director, senior officers and councillors provided good leadership. Ambitions were being effectively communicated to staff. Staff were enthusiastic.
- **The Inspectors judged the leadership and management style to be “open and empowering”** Staff were encouraged to test out new ideas and learn from professional networks.
- A learning culture was in place to support improvement. Learning was actively promoted across the organisation. Staff were well informed and had the opportunity to contribute to two way communication.

Ambition

- The council's *Best Value Performance Plan 2002/03* (BVPP) outlined its overall mission and ambition as:
‘Improving the quality of life for all those involved with our city’.
- The Plan also referred to one of the three key corporate aims as;
‘To seek to achieve the highest standards of cleanliness in all areas of the City.
- Following CPA in 2004 the Council set out to become a 'Good' Council by April 2008, and to become an 'Excellent' Council by 2010. This shows a continued ambition even though results to date would suggest this ambition

was too ambitious.

Managing Performance

- The Comprehensive performance Inspection report of October 2004 judged the Council to be **fair**. It recognised that it had been over-ambitious in the past. As a result it was not found to be delivering high quality services or improving these over time. There was evidence of a shared commitment to serve the community and work constructively together, supported by clear protocols, roles and responsibilities.
- The council was not however using performance data to identify success, or to highlight and share good practice.
- The council recognised that whilst individual PIs were improving they were not improving at a rate sufficient to improve their quartile position, relative to other district councils.
- There was evidence of an ongoing focus on street cleanliness in the City during 2006/07. These actions resulted in satisfaction levels with street cleanliness improving significantly from 57 per cent to 68 per cent, but this was insufficient to lift the Council's comparative performance out of the worst quartile.

Summary

In summary from 2003 to 2008 the Council had moved from a fair one star Council to a fair towards good. In 2008 it was judged to be continuing to improve. The Council was ambitious; following CPA in 2004 the Council set out to become a 'Good' Council by April 2008, and to become an 'Excellent' Council by 2010. During 2003 interviews undertaken by the Inspectors revealed weaknesses with internal communications and some poor cross-department working and sharing of ideas. In 2003 the Inspectors found the depot to be untidy and poorly laid out, with poor working and management practices that were affecting store operations, transport management, vehicle maintenance and staff morale. When the research interviews were undertaken here in February 2009, almost six years after this inspection the depot facilities had not been improved however a new building was under construction. Staff interviewed were looking forward to occupying this new building. However in 2004 **The Inspectors judged the leadership and management style to be “open and empowering”** Staff were encouraged to test out new ideas and

learn from professional networks. A learning culture was in place to support improvement. Learning was actively promoted across the organisation. Staff were well informed and had the opportunity to contribute to two way communication.

Local Authority E Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows E1 is the Service Manager who line manages Supervisor E2 who in turn line manages Operative E3. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

The Service Manager and Supervisor have worked for this Council for many years all working through the ranks to achieve their current role. The Operative had only been in post for just over one year. The Council has merged together all environmental street scene services and were working to a contract specification including services that had previously worked in isolation.

The Service Manager described the responsibilities of the post as being operational for example cutting the grass, sweeping the streets, collecting refuse etc. Reference was however made to constantly finding ways to improve the service. The Service manager felt she was working for an ambitious Council and that the public were getting a high standard of service. The service standards were specified in a formal contract although it was felt there was still scope to change things operationally. Some work was undertaken on a neighbourhood basis but the majority was based on cycles with little scope for change. She felt she had a close working relationship with her line manager and could change the way work was undertaken.

“As far as the day to day running. I am in control of that”.

She was confident to make changes on the basis that if they went “belly up” then it would be her fault and she would sort it out. She would only seek reference and approval if it was a radical change that was proposed.

“If it wasn’t radical then I would not seek reference. I would just carry on”.

The Supervisor and Operative also felt the public were getting a high standard of service however although the Supervisor felt he was working for an ambitious Council the Operative did not and said.

"I think they seem happy just plodding along".

Although the Service Manager described working to a defined contract with a great deal of monitoring reports being necessary the Supervisor when asked if he was working to any National or Local Standards replied.

"I presume there is a standard we have got to work to but I have not seen anything to let me know".

The Inspectors also commented on this saying that there were few service standards and these were not being communicated to staff.

The Service Manager had a good understanding of Empowerment and felt she was empowered as well as also empowering her teams.

"I think it is a word that is used sometimes too often. It's the buzz word at the moment empowerment. What it means to me is that my supervisors I let them get on with the job. It is their job to make sure it works properly and the same with the team leaders. So I empower them to do that and if I find that there is a problem we will talk about and I say this isn't working why isn't it working? So it is about empowerment. From the bottom up again because you can't just empower the managers you need to empower your supervisors".

"Sometimes I do feel I need to talk to them and say 'look is this really working'? I have been out there and I don't think it really is. We need to talk about how it is going to be done but generally speaking I like to think my team leaders are going to look at their teams and each team and area are quite different. So it is up to them to work out how to get the best for that area. We get more community involvement so it is up to them to work it out. I am always there to support them. We have team meetings as well".

This Council had improved dramatically between 2002 and 2004 when Audit Inspectors judged the leadership and management to be *"open and empowering"* with staff encouraged to test out new ideas.

The empowering attitude of the Service Manager is repeated in discussions with the Supervisor who although he had not come across the term empowerment, once offered a definition felt he was empowered and that he empowered his teams.

"The guys can see what needs to be done. If they get tickets coming in they have to go off and sort them out. At the end of the day it's the guys out there who know what wants doing more than we do. So it works out fine".

"I find if you are a dictator then the blokes tend to tense up and you get less from the staff. That is my impression anyway".

"It's a team effort. Because if it is a team effort they can't come to you and say oh this can't be done. If they have all had input into it they should be happy with what is to be done"

The Operative confirmed that this style of management continued to the front line with several statements to support this.

"He leaves me to get on with it because I know what I am doing in my job. I go out and help the other guys as well. Yes it is quite good just to be left to it".

"I have already changed things. I have seen quicker and easier ways to do things and I have just changed it".

"It makes you feel as though you have a little bit of freedom so you can change your working style. I can change things to speed up the process. I don't think it could get much quicker at the moment".

The Inspectors reported that;

"Staff were well informed and had the opportunity to contribute to two way communication".

This was confirmed during interviews however it seemed that this was specific to the service area. The Operative was frustrated that the "bigger picture" was not being communicated and that he was only actively involved in minor operational issues.

"Little things I can change on my own. But if there was a meeting about other staff that is going on. I don't get any say in it. I don't get to know what is going on in other departments. It is much restricted. We hear what is going on by the grapevine. A lot of it gets twisted though. So you can never know what is really going on. They keep it you know management is management and we are separate".

Basically, they don't sort of listen. Yes there are definitely some barriers there stopping you from doing big changes so there are a few I want to change but can't".

The Council had improved between 2003 and 2008 from a fair one star Council to a fair towards good Council. It was judged to be continuing to improve. The Inspectors reported evidence of a culture of empowerment which was confirmed during all three interviews.

Authority F – Waste Management Service

Inspection Summary

- July 2002 judged a **“good” or two-star service** which **had promising prospects for improvement**.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment in December 2002 concluded that the Council itself remained largely traditional in culture, style and structure, characterised by continuity rather than change. The way in which the council operated did not support cross cutting and strategic priorities or help it deal with an increasingly complex and changing environment.
- The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of April 2008 found the Council to be improving adequately. It continued to make progress in its priority areas. Recycling and street cleaning had improved.
- The Audit Commission’s overall judgement was that the City Council was improving adequately, and the Inspectors had classified the Council as **two-star** in its current level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Quality of service provision

- The waste collection and disposal service was efficient with low costs and satisfaction levels were above average.
- The streets were cleaned to a good standard which was reflected in above average satisfaction levels, but the cost of the service was higher than in many similar councils.
- The Council’s waste management services were found to be accessible and responsive and fly tipping and abandoned vehicles were being removed speedily.
- The Council’s recycling rate was the worst of any unitary authority in England.
- The Improvement Plan was comprehensive and identified areas of weakness and would deliver improvements that the public would notice.
- The Service had a track record of achieving significant change and there was commitment across the Council to the service and to the actions set out in the Improvement Plan.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- From the inspection, it was clear that there was a strong commitment from

senior management, staff and members both to the need for, and value of the waste management service, and to its continuing improvement.

- The style of leadership was found to be centralist rather than corporate, with high profile managerial leadership, strong service departments and a large but comparatively weak corporate centre.
- The council regarded the workforce as its greatest asset, and there was evidence of sustained investment in the creation of apprenticeship schemes in the Direct Labour Organisations. There was investment in training, but the quality and commitment to training and development was variable between departments.
- There had been systematic investment in training senior and second tier managers since 2000, though more effective investment in developing its middle management capacity to deliver the necessary cultural changes and service improvements is needed.
- The culture of the council appeared to be shifting from its traditional, un-challenging and highly departmentalised culture towards a growing awareness of the need to change, but without a real plan on how to get there.

Ambition

- The Council's ambition was to be a City that;
"should be a safe, attractive and sustainable city".

Managing Performance

- The Council did not appear to have a strong record of identifying and addressing poor performance by its own services, which in some cases only became evident through inspection.
- The Audit Commission's overall judgement was that the City Council was improving adequately.
- Improvement was not consistent across all service areas. During 2007/2008 58 per cent of performance indicators (PIs) had improved. This was slightly below the average for similar councils. The corporate assessment of July 2007 rated the Council as performing adequately.
- Overall satisfaction with the Council was however above average.

Summary

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had shown to be improving adequately and was classified as a two star Council in 2002 and again in 2008. The council regarded the workforce as its greatest asset, and there was evidence of sustained investment in the creation of apprenticeship schemes in the Direct Labour Organisations. There was investment in training, but the quality and commitment to training and development was variable between departments. This commitment had not however brought about a noticeable improvement in performance over the six years, None of the Inspections made reference to an empowering culture or an open style of management in fact the Inspectors reported the style of leadership to be centralist.

Local Authority F Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows F1 is the Service Manager who line manages Operational Manager F2 who in turn line manages the Supervisor F3. The Council were unable to provide a front line operative for interview. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

All three employees have worked for this Council for over twenty two years each all working through the ranks to achieve their current role.

All three interviewees had undertaken management development training and development. All had a thorough knowledge of the agreed service standards and the relevant national and local indicators as well as the locally agreed targets relating to those indicators.

Similarly all three felt the public were getting a high standard of service and that they were all working for a high performing and ambitious Council.

The Service manager described the way in which he is managed as follows;

“Quite open, quite laid back. I feel I can voice my opinion it is not just one way from the top. I do get the chance to say my bit and I do feel confident in saying my bit.”

He felt his line manager empowered him;

“I would say yes but I would also add to that we just go ahead and try them we do not need his permission to try things. We would take the rap if it fails though”.

He also felt that in turn he empowered his managers. When asked if he felt he was responsible for deciding how the work is carried out he responded;

“Not solely no. It is the team. Very much the team”

In considering what formal processes were in place to ensure his teams are involved in the decision making process he replied;

“Again it is down the empowerment route. A lot of our supervisors do various estate inspections and all the different bodies go to various community groups. They have to react to whatever needs doing. The work I tend to give them comes from top down but they gather most of the workload themselves”.

“To be honest most of my staff are very much old timers in the old way of thinking and it has been hard work to get them out of that. But now with the way the public realm is managed, I have got to admit they are all taking it on board. So it is quite easy because I have got a willing workforce. They are adaptable to change in fact they quite like change”.

The Audit Inspectors reported a centralist style of leadership and made no reference to a culture of empowerment. Back in 2002 they described the Council as being;

“Largely traditional in culture, style and structure, characterised by continuity rather than change”

The Managers and Supervisors interviewed were present in 2002 and present now in the same roles. The Service Manager makes reference to the past way of working;

“We used to be very much down the old silos whatever you want to call it. There were very strict boundaries to what we did and did not do. Street cleaning and grounds maintenance were put together under street scene

and for a long time it was that's street cleansing and that's grounds maintenance. We have just broken the boundaries down from that's grass and that's road. It doesn't matter now who does it. A supervisor works to a ward now. He is responsible for everything in that ward now. But he is also responsible for reporting things on any private bits of land. So it has empowered them to look after the whole of the area and I think they have enjoyed it. I suppose it is not very nice if you are getting some criticism but on the whole they are getting a lot of praise for the work that they do so it encourage them. It is self motivating really".

The Operations Manager considers he is empowered by his manager as well as empowering his own Supervisors;

"I am very much an applicant of involving the front line staff in decisions like that. It's very much about involving people in the process so that if we do change things and implement a new procedure they know all about it. So there are no barriers".

"I think it is about giving ownership of things to people whether that be empowering a Supervisor to do something and take ownership and feel that they are able to raise a concern or an idea whatever that might be through the system".

"I do like to be able to change and adapt things and have a reasonable amount of control over what I am doing. I think sometimes it doesn't do people any harm to be told either. You need boundaries. You have got to have some. And sometimes they are not palatable. They are not perhaps what you want but at least you are clear. I hate it when there is a situation when you are not quite clear on something".

"I think there is a reasonable amount of freedom there. It is changing methods and ideas. I like to think that the Supervisors can shout up you know and say can we try this particular role this way or that way".

There is a clear statement of intent from both the Service Manager and the Operational Manager to involve staff in the decision making process as well as a clear commitment to empowering and being empowered. The Supervisor however has a somewhat differing stance on these issues with many of his comments contradicting those put forward by his line manager. In his view it does appear that ideas and suggestions are welcomed and he can implement his ideas however there is always a caveat that he must discuss his ideas first and then if granted permission to try them out that he must then keep his line manager informed. Both believe this falls within their own definition of empowerment.

"He doesn't dictate to me. You know he will say what do you think about things. He will invite my opinion. He is fine we will talk things out and if he

wants things doing in a particular way he will explain that. He won't just say this is what we are doing, do it; he will say we are doing it because. That's if I disagree with but no we are fine. He is a reasonable chap and we have no problem".

"We have a particular area of the City that we are responsible for. The outer areas are operated on Council Ward areas. So you have got your area and you are responsible for the cleanliness in that area. You have your men and your kit but it is pretty much your decision how you deploy them. To the best way of doing the job".

"Yes – if I suggest something he will say give it a go and let me know".

"Yes – we have changed things recently with one of the routes. He said do it and if it works fine. If there are any problems let me know".

"I think I could change as much as I wanted to really. If I thought you know within reason. The attitude of my line manager is you sort of run that job and deliver what we need delivering and if you need to make changes to things in order to do that then do them. So but obviously keep me informed"

This need to seek approval and to constantly update is repeated in the style adopted by the Supervisor with his teams. He believes he gives them freedom to act however it is conditional on him knowing in advance what changes are proposed.

"If things are going to change I will ask the people it is affecting their opinion. What they think is good or bad or the position or negatives of that and anything I think may be relevant for me to pass on. If it is useful information one way or another then I will pass it on".

"I give them freedom yes. If one of the lads comes to me and says for example we have got problems on such and such a round say the water board is in the way. So we are going to leave it till last tomorrow then I will say. If you think it will work better like that then just do it".

When specifically asked whether he would expect them to come to him first to okay it rather than just do it and tell him afterwards he responded;

"In the main but I have got a couple who will just go and do stuff but I will say hallo what's going off. Well I just thought. Oh did you now. Well let me know in future please".

It is difficult to see how staff can feel they have any freedom to act in those circumstances however the Supervisor, on his definition, is empowering them. When asked to confirm if he felt he was empowering his teams to just change things? He responded;

"I am happy for them to use their initiative because a lot, well I have got one or two with tunnel vision. Who will only do what they think they absolutely have to do. Because that is how it is laid down. They say work that's not my work so I'm not doing it. But if someone is driving past something and they think it ought to be done and they just do it then yes I am happy with that. That way they are using their initiative and it is a problem solved even before it gets to me".

Having disengaged staff who are unaware of the empowerment philosophy within this Council would be a barrier to implementing this as a means to deliver improvements. This Council has not brought about a discernable improvement in performance over the past six years being judged as a two star Council in 2002 and again in 2008. The interviewees have been an influential part of the Council during that period. Despite efforts at a senior level to involve front line staff it would appear that there could be a barrier at the critical interface between Supervisor and front line Operative. Unfortunately it was not possible to seek the views of any front line staff on this occasion.

Authority G – Environmental Services

Inspection Summary

- January 2002 judged a “**no star service** which had **poor prospects for improvement**.”
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Report of 2003 / 2004 now considered the Council to be “***ambitious with a visible drive to improve***”.
- Environmental Services section was inspected again in 2004 and judged to a “**fair**” **one-star** service with **excellent prospects for improvement**.
- The Comprehensive Performance Assessment of 2005 found the Council had continued to improve since 2004.
- The Comprehensive Performance Assessment of 2008 found the Council had continued to improve since 2005.
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of April 2008 stated that the Council had a good track record of improvement in its priority services.

Quality of service provision

- In 2002 the Inspectors felt that the Authority had critical weaknesses which were not being addressed
- Services lacked strategic co-ordination and management which led to poor planning and procurement decisions
- The implications of the Street care concept were not fully supported by Members and officers;
- Around these services, the Council had demonstrated a culture of feuding, much confusion and stress which meant there had not been the collective internal will to resolve problems;
- Area working was not integrated at service delivery or management levels across all functions,
- Improvement plans were largely process driven and internally focussed within individual silos.
- Area based working in Street care was organised in areas but the operational activities were still largely being delivered as separate functions. There was

evidence that standards varied between the geographic areas suggesting a lack of understanding in regard to agreed standards between work groups.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- In 2002 the Inspectors found no evidence of empowerment or freedom to act with most operations bound by rigid contracts preventing innovation and flexibility. Although work had begun by the Grounds and Streets DSO to eliminate duplication, there remained some duplication between street cleaners and grounds maintenance and estates/parks etc. This poor co-ordination of resources resulted in different teams litter picking different parts of the same footpath or road.
- Even though the authority stated that area working was the way it wanted to deliver services in the future it was not integrated at service delivery or management levels across the service functions nor was there a coherent plan to overcome these difficulties.
- In 2004 however Inspectors found that staff morale was high and staff demonstrated a real understanding and enthusiastic commitment to the council and its priorities for improvement. They are consciously and actively involved in developing new approaches to service delivery and new initiatives.
- The council was now using training to develop the knowledge and skills of managers within the organisation. Management activities such as '**the modern empowered manager**' and '**inspirational leadership**' had taken place for senior managers and capacity of middle managers was being systematically developed through a structured programme of assessment and coaching.
- This strategic decision to introduce empowerment as the culture and to root out old behaviours was being driven at all levels of management with a clear link to performance improvement and ambition.
- It marked a clear change of culture: openness was encouraged, there was a permission to admit when things were not working, and staff were being **encouraged to contribute to the development of solutions and freed to make changes.**
- The council had held two conferences in 2003 on "**the modern empowered manager**" to develop a shared understanding of corporate values.

Ambition

- In 2002 “Valuing our Environment’ was one of the Council’s five core values however overall, the Inspectors felt that the Authorities management of the long-term future of the environment was poor.
- The Comprehensive performance assessment Improvement report of 2003-2004 found the Council to be ambitious with a visible drive and hunger to improve shared by the majority of staff and councillors.
- The Comprehensive Performance Assessment of 2005 found the Council had continued to improve since 2004. It was still considered to be an ambitious council
- The Comprehensive performance assessment of 2008 concluded that the Council had continued to improve since 2004. It was considered to be an ambitious council.
- The council was considered self-aware and clear about what it needed to change in order to achieve its aim of being classified as ‘**excellent**’ by 2008.

Managing Performance

- The many conflicts found by the Inspectors in 2002 at various levels of the service were causing much confusion, uncertainty and stress. Without resolving these conflicts the Inspectors felt the service to the public would not improve.
- There was confusion in 2002 between the different geographic areas of service delivery, and tensions between reactive and planned work. There were no single business processes across the whole organisation and different service and delivery standards existed throughout.
- Since the 2002 inspection there had been substantial improvements in town centre cleanliness, including the introduction of the ‘gold standard’ for cleanliness within the town centre and a litter ‘hit squad’.
- In 2004 performance of environmental services continued to improve, enabling the council to achieve **a score of 4 for environment block indicators for the second year running**.
- At the operational level, the Inspectors judged the improvement in environmental services since 2002 to be “rapid”.
- By 2005 the council had continued to have an intense focus on improving its services and establishing effective mechanisms to support this. There had

been significant improvements in some priority services.

- In 2008 the Inspectors judged the improvement in environmental services since 2002 to be “rapid”.

Summary

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had shown rapid and sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Inspectors had identified a specific culture of empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement. The number of performance indicators (PIs) shown as improving was significantly better than average. It had 70 per cent of indicators showing improvement between 2006 and 2007. The marked turn around in performance coincided with the introduction of a management development initiative. The council was now using training to develop the knowledge and skills of managers within the organisation. Management activities such as **‘the modern empowered manager’** and **‘inspirational leadership’** had taken place for senior managers and capacity of middle managers was being systematically developed through a structured programme of assessment and coaching. The Inspectors felt this marked a clear change of culture: openness was encouraged, there was a permission to admit when things were not working, and staff were being **encouraged to contribute to the development of solutions and freed to make changes**. Learning was visibly lead and encouraged by the political and managerial leadership who demonstrated genuine trust in the staff to identify solutions. This is the clearest statement yet of empowerment being embedded into the culture of the organisation.

Local Authority G Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows G1 is the Service Manager who line manages Operational Manager G2 who in turn line manages the Team Leader G3. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

All three have worked for this Council for over twenty years each. It was now operating as an integrated environmental service still working predominantly to service specifications which dated back to the days of CCT (Compulsory

Competitive Tendering). The Service Manager and Operations Manager were aware of the relevant National Indicators however the Team Leader was unaware of any agreed standards or performance measures saying

“it is just how we have been shown over the years”.

Opinions varied in regard to the quality of service ranging from high to reasonable as did opinions on performance and ambition ranging from high performing to just coasting along.

The Service Manager felt he had a relaxed and open door policy type of management from his line manager and felt he was empowered to the extent almost of abdication! This Council has a stated culture of empowerment and he felt his line manager was possibly taking that culture a little too far.

“ Yes – a little too much if I was to be honest. It hasn’t gone as far as abdication but certainly it can be a times”.

“ There is a policy of empowerment but he is applying it a little too liberally”.

His line manager has only been in post two years and would therefore be well aware and involved in the recent corporate initiative to empower managers. The Audit Commission Inspectors made specific reference to this culture on the various inspections between 2002 and 2008.

- In 2002 the Inspectors found no evidence of empowerment or freedom to act with most operations bound by rigid contracts preventing innovation and flexibility.
- In 2005 the council was now using training to develop the knowledge and skills of managers within the organisation. Management activities such as **‘the modern empowered manager’** and **‘inspirational leadership’** had taken place for senior managers and capacity of middle managers was being systematically developed through a structured programme of assessment and coaching.
- This strategic decision to introduce empowerment as the culture and to root out old behaviours was being driven at all levels of management with a clear link to performance improvement and ambition.

- It marked a clear change of culture: openness was encouraged, there was a permission to admit when things were not working, and staff were being **encouraged to contribute to the development of solutions and freed to make changes.**
- The council had held two conferences in 2003 on “**the modern empowered manager**” to develop a shared understanding of corporate values.

The Service Manager also followed this lead by empowering his teams.

“Well, we allocate work through a corporate computer system on a fortnightly basis so we will allocate all the work to a team or an area or a site. And provided that work gets done the manager or the team leaders and the operatives get that work carried out. I don’t dictate how it is to be done obviously if it is done once a week it is done once a week. I don’t go down there and check it off”.

“I think it is a positive process. It is all about managing performance at the end of the day and provided in most case if the allocation of the work is there and that work gets done then most of it follows on from there. It is only when any of the work doesn’t get done that the problems start”.

“I don’t have to chase them to get the work done. Although they will get allocated the work. I delegate the budgets down to the operational managers. The whole work is allocated to the manager but he then allocates it down to the teams or sites. With that cascade of information they know that they have got to do that work. They just go on and do it. We don’t chase them to do it. They get on and do the work”.

This approach is supported in the way the Service Manager manages the Operations Manager. The Operations Manager makes several statements during the course of the interview which confirm that this style is embedded in the service provision;

“He is an open manager. He allows us to make decisions outside. Obviously if there is a decision to be made higher up than we can then we will come and see him. He will let us know but if it is a decision he can’t make it will go higher. But yes he leaves it pretty open to the operation managers. He leaves the operations stuff to us”.

“So I just changed the days round. It is okay to do that if it is not too critical to the service. We can change as and when. And if the service manager, my line manager thinks it’s a good idea he will stick with it. If we do change stuff and it doesn’t work we will go back to the old ways”.

“If I have to change stuff I will just change it. I will just make a phone call. To change a crew round or move a crew from one area to another. On a daily basis I could have to change a crew round”.

“Yes I would say we are empowered. I wouldn’t say we have 100% freedom but we can move we can do stuff. Obviously if it came to the crunch we would have to see our service manager”.

“Within our service area I think the managers have got a pretty free hand to be honest”.

“The team leaders out there are more than capable of taking instructions and going out and doing the work”.

“If I feel there is something that involves the whole team I will get them together first thing of a morning or last thing at night to discuss issues with them. Or if it is just team leaders we will get them all together. They can relay the information down to the crews. Yes we try to keep them all in touch with most things”.

“If I think it will be beneficial to the organisation and it can get the job done then you we give the team leaders pretty much the freedom to do the work as they want to do it. There is no hard and fast rule to say you have got to do it this way. As long as it is safe they can undertake the work the way they want to do it. There is nothing really set in concrete to say well you have to do it this way”.

“They have got to make their own decisions out there and if there is a problem they will phone up”.

The Team Leader confirmed that once on site he and his team would decide without interference how best to plan and execute the physical work. He had not come across the term empowerment but once defined felt he was certainly empowered. This was not an issue to him and his small team as he accepted that the responsibility on deciding how to undertake the work rested with him and his team. He was also happy to give them freedom to change the way in which the work was carried out;

“They will say I want to do it this way and I will say yes as long as it is a safe way of doing it”.

In 2002 this Council was judged to be a no star service with poor prospects for improvement. Two years later it was judged to be a fair one star service with excellent prospects for improvement. It continued to deliver rapid and sustained improvement through to 2008. Part of this improvement was attributed to a culture of empowerment. Evidence that this culture remains in this Council was confirmed in all three interviews.

Authority H – Waste Management Service

Inspection Summary

- October 2004 judged a “**good**” **two-star service** which had **promising prospects for improvement**.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment December 2004 showed that the Council was now judged to be **weak** however the Council described itself as being on a “journey towards excellence”.
- Annual Audit and Inspection Letter March 2008 stated that the Council had maintained it’s rating of two stars. The Council was improving adequately and making progress in improving services. Over half of performance indicators improved in 2006/07 but this was still below national averages and the Councils own recent performance

Quality of service provision

- Efficient and effective refuse collection and street care services that were accessible and responsive to users.
- High satisfaction with the refuse collection service;
- Overall improvements in the cleanliness of streets across the borough and within local areas to exceed the Government’s target;
- A holistic approach to tackling local issues by joining up council services to increase impact;

However, some matters were seen as in need of attention, including:

- Side streets in some residential areas had quite a lot of litter with small build ups and the correct balance between proactive and reactive cleansing had not yet been achieved;
- The improvements in environmental cleanliness were not meeting users’ perceptions and expectations;

Employee attitude and autonomy

- In 2003 the council merged street cleansing and grounds maintenance services so that responsibility for litter removal from shrub beds and grassed areas rested with one service.

- Staff each had personal targets and accepted responsibility for how their performance affected the whole organisation.
- Managers and staff were committed to continuous improvements and had demonstrated their willingness to embrace change. Managers and staff had also recognised the benefits of multi-disciplinary approaches to achieve greater impact in tackling environmental issues.
- An appraisal system reviews staff skills in line with corporate and service aims and highlights training needs and opportunities.
- Inter-departmental working relationships were good and were being enhanced through service improvement groups and a management forum to share learning and identify best practices. Staff appreciated the added value that is gained from working with other professional disciplines to tackle problems.

Ambition

- The Council had ambition and vision:

'We will realise our vision of a borough of well educated people who enjoy good quality employment in a healthy environment;

Managing Performance

- The council was providing an efficient and effective refuse collection service. Recent data for best value performance indicators shows that 83 per cent of local people are satisfied with waste collection.
- Refuse collection and street care services were considered to be efficient and effective taking into account the range and type of services provided.
- Managers and staff were found to have a good awareness of corporate and service aims through the 'Golden Thread' performance framework, which linked individual targets to service improvement plans. Aims and service standards were communicated to users through the Community Litter Plan, a Cleanliness Charter, Corporate plan, area and local litter plans, and the council's website.

Summary

In summary from 2004 to 2008 the Council had maintained a good standard of service provision however it's two star rating had not improved during that period. The Council was judged to be improving adequately in 2008 and making progress in improving services. Over half of performance indicators improved in 2006/07 but this was still below national averages and the Councils own recent performance. Overall satisfaction with the Council rose by nine points but, at 40 per cent, remained low. Inter-departmental working relationships were good and were being enhanced through service improvement groups and a management forum to share learning and identify best practices. Managers and staff were found to be committed to continuous improvements and had demonstrated their willingness to embrace change.

Local Authority H Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows H1 is the Service Manager who line manages Team Leader H2 who in turn line manages the Operative H3. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

All three have worked for this Council in this type of work for more than 19 years each. They have all got to where they are now by working their way up through the ranks.

The service manager believes the public are getting a high standard of service and that the Council is both high performing and ambitious though there is still room for improvement. He is happy with his current manager as;

"He leaves me very much to my own free expression. We all have a look at our service plans. We all have all areas of responsibility. We report back regularly on those, whether we are reaching our targets, whether we are on course to meet them and I think the whole of the set up. We certainly know which way we are going in terms of what we intend and want to achieve in this financial year end even longer term".

This is a different style to his manager previous to this.

"At one time when I first came here I had a manager who was very much the old school. And he was very dictatorial. He was very autocratic in his management style. He did not leave people to get on with things".

He felt there was now a different culture where;

*"Everybody can have a free reign here. You are positively encouraged to come up with ideas and express them if you have something to say".
"I prefer to have some say. I think everyone can be innovative, everyone can have ideas and they should be aired in a proper forum whether you are given credit or otherwise".*

"There are some people that like to be led more certainly, but at the end of the day we are trying to put a team together with team leaders etcetera who will think for themselves, who will come up with good ideas who are accountable, who can operate with some autonomy".

He felt he was empowered by his line manager and that his management style was one of empowerment. He was keen to give his teams freedom in deciding how the work is carried out however;

"As long as it is in line with general planned way forward then yes. We never want to stop people. Don't come to dull their enthusiasm and we don't want to limit them progressing ideas but sometimes they have to be tamed a little bit. There are political and financial constraints to be taken into account".

This is a fairly common theme. Boundaries are expected in the decision making process however unless staff are aware of them how do they know explicitly where the line is drawn?

"Well I think our people now are fairly well trained up to consider the effects of their actions and what they do. And that is something that I will probably highlight and flag up. You know on a day to day basis whenever we are discussing things. To sort of gear them to look into the political and financial aspects. I suppose bottom line is to say that we like to make them accountable for whatever they do. Accountability on their part. If they do something and it goes base over apex then you know".

The Team Leader reinforced this approach as he also felt both empowered and empowering but with limitations boundaries. His definition of empowerment was more one of simple delegation of duties as opposed to a facility to act with more independence.

"If there is something that needs to be done he will pass it down to me. Then I will re-iterate it to the staff but he tends to leave us to get on with it and manage the lads".

When asked if he got the opportunity to come up with new ways of working he gave a positive response.

"I will implement it definitely. If I think of a way I can do something better to improve the overall performance of the job then I will make that decision myself and move the job forward. I am happy that I have got the backing – yes – I suppose I have got the backing of management now in regards to doing the job and obviously if I want to improve performance or carry out the job in a more safe or practical way then they will let me get on with it".

When asked however if he could act independently or whether he would need to get agreement from his line manager first the response again related to boundaries.

"Usually, it depends on how small or how big of a change I am making, but if it is only a minor change then they will just let me get on with it, but if I want to make some form of a big change, or the restructure of a round or something, then I will run it past him and we will obviously discuss it then project plan it and change it that way. We have also to get the unions and everyone involved".

"I feel that I am an open manager. I try to have an open door policy with the lads. In fact I have always said to the lads if I come down on them for any reason at all then I can put it behind me, and hopefully they can do the same, because you know if you are not managed right, I feel you will not get the performance from your staff".

"If you don't let somebody manage. If you can't let somebody manage then they should not be in the position they are in. You know that should go for all positions really. Unless they overstep the mark and start doing silly things like just employing people without going through agreed procedures. Say spending wise, if you just overspend. The budgets are set for who can spend so much".

"I prefer to have some say and am allowed to manage. If you want a lapdog then employ a lapdog".

"If you work for someone and say yes sir I will do whatever you say sir, then that's not letting you manage. That's not letting you get on with your job".

The interview then considered where the Team Leader felt the responsibility for deciding how the work should be carried out rested. Despite this statement that people should be allowed to manage whatever position they may be in when asked

if as a Team Leader he felt it was his responsibility to decide how the work is carried out he responded.

“Yes – I mean from day one when I first started with 17 staff. I have always done it from day one to have all the lads working as a team. Whereas the refuse who have been here a long time, they don’t do that. You can see the difference between the refuse and the recycling. My lads will work well together and they will assist each other when we are quiet. I have built that into the team. It works very well”.

“The drivers are classed as supervisors to the team that they work in, but only on a supervisory side to tell them where they are going or where they start, but overall I virtually oversee everything along with a colleague that works alongside me”.

“The lads book on and off at the window on a morning. We give out instructions there or we can talk to them or we can also do site visits with them. To make sure that the work is carried out we will do inspections. Team inspections to check the quality of the work”.

This sends out a confusing and mixed message so for confirmation he was asked whether he felt that the work was up to him and they just carried out his decisions? To which he responded.

“Yes – followed by a pause”.

The Operative saw his role as purely operational and described his key responsibilities as getting the bins emptied with a view to getting finished and getting off home. He did not share his Team Leaders view that he or his colleagues were involved in any decision making process or were recognised or appreciated.

“The ethics are excellent but there is not enough management involvement. They just give us a set of keys and off you pop in the morning. If for any reason that you have to leave a bin or anything like that they are not interested. You get sent back for missed bins and other things like you are never defended when the public complains or anything. You should fully expect management backing and for them to believe you rather than believe the complainants”.

“I am not really managed. I just get on to the bins. We are just left to our own devices. The only time we have any interaction with the managers is when there has been a complaint such as a bin been missed. We never get any praise, or a job well done or anything like that”.

"Usually we get tickets if a round is changing but as a rule we would get a memo stating that there is an addition or a deletion at the best. It is usually though a week after it starts that we get to know about it".

Rather than having a feeling of inclusion he reported a feeling amongst his peers of exclusion and isolation.

"Most of the lads on the rounds well they know what is changing on the rounds. Say for example if someone dies and it was an assisted lift at that house. Well the lads know that. Then we tell the management but they don't act and say no 'just forget it'. They don't listen to us or do something. It is the same with repairs to containers or wheelie bins. We report them and there is a crew that goes round to repair them. They are 'just dragging these bins and containers round'. So they get broken and they don't get repaired. When you have reported them four times and nothing happens then what can you do? The next step is for us to just leave the container but then you just get sent back".

"They just want you out of the yard at quarter past seven".

"They are more reactive than proactive".

"Nine times out of ten you are happy just to go out and get the round done. Basically that is how everybody feels with task and finish. But if something is not going right and you are dragged into the office then you just don't feel like doing it".

He was clear on his definition of empowerment as having the capabilities to make decision but when asked if he felt empowered he responded ;

"Not particularly no. We have rules and regulations that we have to abide by and you do try to follow them but the unfortunate thing is you follow them to the letter then you upset the public. You know you are not supposed to take extras but we do. If you don't take them, if you leave them they get upset. They will phone up and you will get sent back. You don't get any back up. So it is easier just to take it".

He was clear in his view that if he and his colleagues were afforded the opportunity to influence the way the work is undertaken that there would be benefits.

"Because your point of view can be put across. Someone that does the job day to day. They know the ins and outs of it. So they know the difficulties. Nine times out of ten they will know the solutions to put into place".

However when asked if he ever did consider raising suggestions his response was;

“Not really no – If you raise your head above water you are just going to get into trouble so it is not worth it”. I am a union rep and I have to defend lads who are being disciplined for trivial things. Things that should get sorted by a chat through the window. It is diabolical over silly things. If there was only empowerment and management did back us up then there would be a lot less disciplinaries.

There is a clear difference in how both parties see the management relationship. From a Service Manager and Team Leader perspective processes and procedures are in place to enable co-operative and inclusive working. Yet the Operative provides no evidence of this at all and in fact has a contrary view of things where the exact opposite is the case. This was put to the Operative by asking him whether from the management perspective he felt that if they had a more open style to make decisions. Did he think they did not want to work in that way? To which he responded;

“They definitely want to dictate how it is done. They have their own agenda and they can see where they have been told where to go. All they want to do is get the rounds out as soon as possible by any means. It doesn’t matter how or whether they break the law. The drivers break the law ten times a day”.

The Audit Inspection assessments make no reference to the management style exhibited at this council. The Journey of improvement has not been consistent and its two star rating had not improved from 2004 to 2008. Whether the managers adopt an inclusive style depends on which level in the structure you seek confirmation. There appears a belief that it is being applied at Service Head and above however it becomes diluted at Team Leader level and there is a contrary view proposed at Operative level.

Authority J – Street Scene Service

Inspection Summary

- August 2001 judged a “**fair**” or **one-star service** which **would probably improve**.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment December 2002 described the Council as being a traditional Council in transition
- A Corporate Assessment Report of December 2005 considered the Council to be ambitious with sound political and managerial leadership. The Council’s performance was judged to be Adequate.
- The service was subject to a further inspection in 2007 and was now assessed as being a ‘**fair**’, one-star service that has **promising prospects for improvement**. This was an improvement on the 2001 assessment where the service was judged to be ‘**fair**’ one star service that would **probably improve**.
- The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 reported the Council as improving adequately, and it was now rated as a **two-star Council** under CPA methodology.

Quality of service provision

- The streets were clean and the performance had significantly improved over the past year;
- The Environmental Action Unit was popular and successful; and
- Enforcement in relation to dog fouling had significantly improved.

A number of aspects of the service required attention and these were:

- Public satisfaction with some areas was low;
- Shrub beds and grassed areas have unacceptable amounts of litter;
- The fragmentation of the services had led to some duplication of work for example, multiple inspections of the same area; and
- Current contracts were of a mixture of input, frequency based specifications e.g. grass was being cut whether it needed it or not; and output specifications where work was carried out as necessary.
- The best value improvement plan proposed radical changes in service delivery and was also consistent with corporate aims and objectives. It

addressed the current fragmentation of services and key public concerns;

- Comparative performance had improved overall. Cleanliness of relevant land had improved from the worst 25 per cent in 2003/04 to below the median in 2005/06. Unaudited data in 2006/07 showed that the quality was consistent with better than the median performance in 2005/06.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- The Inspectors made specific reference in the inspection report that the teams *“had a degree of autonomy making day to day decisions at local level. In addition, four ‘hit teams’ removed fly tips and responded to customer complaints.”* This was a clear indication that the service considered empowerment as an aid to improvement. However this approach however was not found throughout the service with the Inspectors also reporting that there were still some internal departmental barriers to improvement. The Council had however acted on this with a commitment to removing these departmental barriers in order to deliver an integrated service.
- It had developed some imaginative approaches to service improvement, but these had remained locked in the original service departments and learning had not been systematically shared.
- The management reorganisation was intended to promote a more effective strategic approach by delegating operational decisions to service heads and leaving Executive Directors free to manage more strategically. The new structure was also intended to improve cross-departmental working. A management development programme had been produced and some initial training had taken place.
- The Inspectors singled out the environmental services team by reporting that Limited progress had been made on challenging existing patterns of service provision through best value reviews, although some changing work patterns were beginning to emerge, for example in some environmental services.
- Staff were found to be demonstrating commitment and detailed concern on the ground, showing innovation in delivering a wide range of service initiatives in often difficult contexts.
- The Council had adopted a set of values, badged as ‘single team principles’, which referred among other things to a **can-do attitude**.
- The tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council’s

values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff.**

- The Inspectors again made reference to the introduction of multi-skilling for grounds maintenance and street services staff to provide a joined-up approach. Work was being arranged to ensure maximum impact in relation to environmental objectives through multi-disciplinary teams and the Inspectors again referred to the **staff empowerment and a 'can-do' culture.**

Ambition

- A Corporate Assessment Report carried out in December 2005 considered the Council to be ambitious with sound political and managerial leadership.

Managing Performance

- Comparative performance had improved overall. Cleanliness of relevant land had improved from the worst 25 per cent in 2003/04 to below the median in 2005/06. Unaudited data in 2006/07 showed that the quality was consistent with better than the median performance in 2005/06.
- The council had succeeded in delivering substantial service improvement in some major individual services, but there appeared to be no systematic approach to ensuring that this occurred across the council.
- The best value improvement plan proposed radical changes in service delivery and was also consistent with corporate aims and objectives. It addressed the current fragmentation of services and key public concerns.

Summary

In summary from 2001 to 2008 the Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Inspectors had identified examples of self-direction and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement. The Inspectors reported that “The council had succeeded in delivering substantial service improvement in some major individual services”.

The tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council’s values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without

upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff.**

The tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council's values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff.**

Local Authority J Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the Council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows J1 is the Service Manager who line manages the Team Manager J2 who in turn line manages the Team Leader J3. The Council was unable to provide a front line Operative for interview on day of the interviews. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

Between 2001 to 2008 this Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Audit Inspectors had identified examples of self-direction and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement. The Inspectors reported that

“The council had succeeded in delivering substantial service improvement in some major individual services. The tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council's values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff**”.

With the exception of the Service Manager who had joined the council from the private sector six years ago the Team manager and Team Leader had both been employed by this Council on this type of work for 32 years and 29 years respectively. The team were delivering an integrated Street Scene service.

Perceptions in regard to the quality of the services they were providing ranged from high to medium to decent. All three were well informed in regard to service

standards and expectations in regard to the agreed National and Local Performance Indicators. They all felt they were now working for a high performing and ambitious council however this had not been the case in recent years. The Service Manager described his previous manager as being autocratic but his new manager was described as open and very laid back. He was expected to manage his own workload and felt that he had ample opportunity to put ideas forward and that his suggestions were welcomed and tried out. He felt he was in a position to directly influence 80% of his workload and defined empowerment as;

"Giving people the authority, the power the confidence, the backing, the support to go forward and try their own ideas and strike out on their own and take control of themselves"

He only felt he was empowered to an extent and said;

"I think he tends to it sounds like I am whinging here. I tend to be put on to be quite honest which doesn't allow you to be empowered. I am looking after four sections at the moment and there are other managers on the same level who are just looking after one. And I can say I want to do this and I can't do this and just because you are willing you to tend to get put on".

There was a plethora of meetings in order to communicate with all levels which were all described as having open agendas. There was a feeling that the tide was turning and managers were now being actively encouraged to transfer the power to a lot of people. This was a change in culture leaving the Service still feeling responsible for responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out.

"Yes to an extent and it is not necessarily how I want to be. But it is sometimes just how it is. There has been a culture in the past of people looking up for that sort of direction. People not acting up to the jobs and pushing it back up on to you".

Although he felt he did give his teams freedom in changing how the work was undertaken he also stated that;

"I think it depends on what level to be quite honest. More so of late we want it to go through well at least touching base with me. Because of the way it has operated in the past. It has been run as four different sections with four different managers and everyone has been doing things a different way. We have got a new transformation programme that we have just put in and we are trying to get everyone sort of not doing everything the same but sort of rationalising what we are doing".

"I give them quite a lot of autonomy. Individual projects. If they come up with ideas and things like that. I don't try to do everything myself I do pass it to them and I do encourage to think for themselves and come up with solutions and ideas"

The Team Manager outlined various issues with his line manager to the extent that he bypassed him at every occasion and just managed his own workload in isolation. No formal or informal steps were being taken to address this matter by either party. Communication was by e-mail or notes left on desks. Putting this to one side and attempting to get a view on how his service was operated as a whole he felt that the opportunity was there to bring forward ideas. He felt he had a direct influence on 75% of his workload. He defined empowerment as;

"Having ownership and taking responsibility for your decisions. For your areas and for your actions basically".

He felt that empowerment was a tactic used throughout this Council by the good managers but unfortunately his manager, in his opinion, did not come into that category.

When considering the managers that he allocated work to and the methods he adopted he felt it was not his responsibility to decide how the work should be carried out however his response gave a mixed message.

"No I think the way a job is carried out is down to the supervisors and the lads who are doing it. Because they are front line staff and they know what they are doing . If I want something done a particular way though I will tell them this is how I want it done".

"If they come up with an idea they are welcome to put it forward and it will be discussed. It won't be dismissed out of hand. It will be discussed and if it is a good idea then it will be trialled. I would never put anything in place straight off that has not been trialled first. I have been bitten once too often. They are always welcome to put suggestions through. We have a suggestion box anyway that they can actually use".

It seems that all suggestions must be given a green light by him before they can be implemented and even then they are subject to a trial. When asked if by giving freedom to operate it could have an effect on the quality of the service he immediately related to a negative effect rather than a positive effect by responding;

"No because it would be monitored and if it wasn't working. You know if something is going to work. We wouldn't let it. You know if something is

going to work in the first week or a fortnight so before it got out of hand it would be reigned in. We would say forget that one”.

However he still considered that he is empowering his managers in this way. When asked if he thought he was empowering his teams through this approach he responded;

“Yes I think so. I am not a dictatorial manager that says you will do it this way. If it is going right great. If there are problems came and see me”.

This style suggests he demands a high degree of control over operations and when asked if there was anything he would change in the way in which he manages that would improve performance he responded by saying;

“Probably not to lose my temper as quickly. I have got a short fuse when things are going wrong but we do have a lot of pressure at the moment. I don’t really know. That’s an awful question. I would like the supervisors to take more responsibility which would free me up to do the planned things financial things as well”.

When asked if he thought they would welcome that approach he responded;

“No I have tried it. They will do just what is expected. They are not forward thinking enough. That is what I want to encourage. I have tried doing it on numerous occasions but they see that as my job. I have got one supervisor who is frightened of making a decision. Stuff that he should be dealing with on a daily basis he comes to me with. I think I need to step back a little bit”.

The Team Leader confirmed the lack of opportunity for true participation and involvement. When asked if he got the chance to put ideas forward he replied;

“I would say we do get the chance yes. Yes both formally and informally. We have a suggestion box. With our managers it is an open door policy. The ideas usually get kaiboshed mind!”

When asked if ideas are welcomed and generally tried out he replied;

“I would say no. Not like they used to be no”.

He defined empowerment as;

“I would say it is them giving me the responsibility to make a decision and go and do it. To be honest you don’t get that here. I would say that they like to

think we are but when it comes down to it we aren't. When we were just street cleansing we had a lot of empowerment. When we got the manufacturers in for sweepers we did the test. The blokes got the chance to give their feedback. There was a lot more input from the shop floor and involvement right up to the management but I would say over the last seven to nine years that has gone. I don't think there is any of that now"

He felt it should be his responsibility to decide how the work should be carried out. He felt he personally gave his team members a lot of freedom to change the way the work is carried out and felt from his perspective that he was empowering his team however it was again conditional on seeking his approval first.

"I mean if someone comes up and says "I want to change it" then they will run it through me and I will say right. I mean me personally I would say I don't care how you do it as long as it gets done. As long as it is efficient and value for money and no-one is taking the piss".

Looking at his line manager he was asked if there was anything he would change in the way he was managed that would improve performance? His response not surprisingly was;

"Yes. To take a step back really and let us manage. When you are an operational manager it is hard to let go. You know we will find that we he will interfere really. He will do it which makes you a bit lethargic you know. You will say well you just do it. Unless you are a forceful type of person to tell him to butt out.

Each level believes that empowerment is a positive strategy however there is little evidence from the interviews to support the Audit Inspectors view that this Council had a

*"tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the council's values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff**".*

Authority K – Waste Management Service

Inspection Summary

- December 2002 judged a **“good” or two-star service** which had **promising prospects for improvement**.
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment of April 2004 showed that the Council had made significant strides from a low base over the last two years and was now judged to be a fair Council.
- The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 found the Council's overall performance was below the average for all district councils in terms of a selected set of performance measures for 2006/07. The rate of improvement during the past three years was judged to be very low compared with other district councils.

Quality of service provision

- The borough's roads, streets and beaches were predominantly free of litter and refuse;
- Refuse collection was a reliable and efficient service, provided to a high standard;
- Overall satisfaction with refuse collection, street cleansing and recycling facilities was high;
- The Service was found to be responsive with efficient, helpful and polite staff.

Employee attitude and autonomy

- However, the Inspectors highlighted some outstanding issues around the working practices including the fact that front line staff across the Waste Management and Grounds Maintenance Services were not integrated to improve the overall quality of the street scene and there were some staff who were still working to a rigid contract based specification which negated the most effective use of resources.
- Managers were considered to be committed and new appointments had strengthened the management structure. Front line staff had a positive attitude and recognised that there was a need for change to improve service efficiency and effectiveness with an emphasis on the service to customers. However, some supervisory staff still continued the practices of the previous

contractor and kept to a contract based specification for street cleansing, even though this was not in fact being monitored satisfactorily.

- Arrangements to establish and maintain staff focus included departmental briefing sessions as well as monthly managers meetings hosted by the general manager, and internal newsletters. There were some examples where this had led to more integrated service delivery, though with limited evidence yet that this had improved service quality.

Ambition

- The Council's ambition was to provide a;

'rural and urban environments that can be enjoyed by all people, now and for generations to come, and which contribute to their health, quality of life and economic prospects'.

Managing Performance

- Current performance in a range of council services is generally satisfactory, but there were some areas where the council was not performing well. Performance against almost a quarter of national performance indicators was amongst the top 25 per cent in the country.
- Cleanliness of public spaces was generally of a high standard.
- In respect of the indicators that cover waste collection and recycling, the Council had continued to achieve overall improvement in this area but this had been below the average improvement achieved by other authorities in the last three years.

Summary

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had shown limited improvement in performance. There was recognition from front line staff of a need to change to improve service efficiency and effectiveness with an emphasis on the service to customers. However, some supervisory staff still continued the practices of the previous contractor and kept to a contract based specification for street cleansing. The Inspectors also highlighted some outstanding issues around the working practices including the fact that front line staff across the Waste Management and Grounds Maintenance Services were not integrated to improve the overall quality of the street scene and there were some staff who were still working to a rigid contract

based specification which negated the most effective use of resources. This clearly demonstrated a control culture with no evidence of any freedom to act or to concentrate on outputs. Meetings to establish and maintain staff focus included departmental briefing sessions as well as monthly managers meetings hosted by the general manager, and internal newsletters. There were some examples where this had led to more integrated service delivery, though with limited evidence yet that this had improved service quality.

Local Authority K Interview Transcript analysis.

The interviews undertaken explored the perception of the ambition of the council and the perceived levels of autonomy and freedom to operate of the operational employees involved in the delivery of these services during this period. For ease of reference and confidentiality they have been coded in the full transcripts as follows K1 is the Service Manager who line manages the Supervisor K2. The council was unable to provide a third member of staff to be interviewed on the day. The full transcripts are included as Appendix C.

The service manager had been employed by this council for more than 16 years. The Supervisor had only worked there for less than two years and had previously worked in this type of work but in the private sector. Each and had taken the opportunity to gain recognised vocational qualifications throughout their term of employment.

The Service Manager did not feel that the council was delivering a high standard of service but felt the council was keen to be recognised as high performing and ambitious. However it was her view that most of the staff would be happy to be considered a good authority. The way she was managed was described as;

"I'm left to get on with things basically on my own. I only go to my Line Manager when I'm struggling with something or I'm not sure what direction to take. I plan my own workload plus a lot of it is driven by the events of the day, whatever happens. There are things that have got to be done all the time; Things like best value performance indicators, you know that they have got to be done; I suppose there is a timescale on those. It's something we're working to all year round. Then things like service plans, you're given timescales but they are not saying tomorrow you've got to do this, this and this, but I suppose things come in".

She defined empowerment as;

"I would say it's been given the authority and freedom to make decisions or to act on your own judgement".

Freedom to act and make decisions was considered an important aspect of the role and she felt she was empowered by her manager on various issues;

"Yes. I think it's a whole range of things. Quite often he delegates things that he would maybe do otherwise, but it isn't delegating to get rid of things it's more about allowing me to develop as a manager, so sometimes I can get the credit for things that he should have done. I would say the degree of empowerment that I've got now is more than what I had when I started out and I think it comes with experience and he's given me more and more as I've developed and become able to do more things".

Although the bulk of the work she allocated to her Supervisors was routine there was still scope for freedom to act and she felt that through both formal and informal channels that she gave that freedom to act and also to come up with ideas.

"We try to do an awful lot as a team and if we're doing particular projects or things we'll make sure that we regularly meet, and although I would normally chair the meeting I think I do everything I can to encourage input and them to disagree with me if they want to and come up with different ways of doing things. I think they are pretty good. Most of them they are always coming up with ideas which they run by me and say is it alright if we do this, or sometimes after the event they'll say I've done this, was it ok".

When asked if she considered that she empowered her Supervisors she responded;

"I do yes. I would hope so yes. The fact that I think I've got a fairly well motivated team and they do come up with ideas, they do suggest new ways of doing things.

We're constantly discussing progress and how we could change things, we never stand still, and we're always looking at what we can do next".

The Supervisor had moved to the Public Sector from the Private Sector and had taken some time to adjust. He commented on the freedom in the Public Sector when compared to his Private Sector post.

" When I worked in the Private Sector you had to work under strict rules .It's like the bible so if I went to the toilet and you were my manager you would know where I was at. It was really really tight. That was one thing I found strange when I came here, it was the freedom that people had here. When I worked at my last company you were given your jobs for the day on an A4

sheet and you carried on with them jobs and you carried on until they were complete”.

He did feel empowered and that he had freedom to change the way things were done without having to first get permission. He felt this had a positive impact on the quality of the work.

“On the whole yes, if it’s the day to day running of things, if we have an idea or it’s the operational side of things we go ahead to do it, we have the backing to do it”.

“I like the way that I think we are trusted. That’s what I like, it fills you with confidence, it boosts you, and it picks up your moral”.

“I think it does, you know we haven’t got someone standing over us all day long. My line manager from what I can honestly say trusts people to do a day’s work and leave you to it”.

“Well my line manager leaves us to get on with things really. You know we manage the operational side I would think 100%”.

Both informal and formal procedures were in place to ensure his teams were involved and he actively sought suggestions and felt he was empowering his teams.

“We do team talks, we’ve only started them really, we’ve only had two, but we have team talks, the office door is always open if anyone has any concerns they can come and see us at anytime, which everyone knows that”.

“From the workforce really, they felt that they weren’t getting a lot of support so rather than have a room of twenty men shouting at the same time we decided to let them speak to one another and maybe volunteers of four or five to meet with supervisors and my line manager and discuss things and it seems to have worked well”.

“You know we are open to their suggestions too, if we give them an order for want of a better word, but they think oh we can do it better this way, as long as it is safe and is to the procedure then its fine”.

“We are giving the instructions down and at the end of the day we can say they can do it that way or they can’t. You know if we give instruction and they can do it a better way and we give them the go ahead and I also feel it builds moral as well. If they have got the say. Obviously they don’t run the show we do, but we try and be fair and we listen to people”.

From 2002 to 2008 this council had shown limited improvement in performance. The Inspectors highlighted some outstanding issues around the working practices

including the fact that front line staff across the services were not integrated to improve the overall quality of the street scene. There were some staff who were still working to a rigid contract based specification which negated the most effective use of resources. This clearly demonstrated a control culture with no evidence of any freedom to act or to concentrate on outputs. Meetings to establish and maintain staff focus included departmental briefing sessions as well as monthly managers meetings hosted by the general manager, and internal newsletters. The interviews confirm that these meetings are now in place with staff more engaged in the process. There were some examples where this had led to more integrated service delivery, though with limited evidence yet that this had improved service quality.

5.2 Primary Research Findings

The preceding section provided a tabular summary of the service delivery improvement journey over the life of this study for each of the sample authorities. The data was derived from detailed assessments and inspections from, where appropriate, Best Value reviews, Comprehensive Performance Assessments, and Corporate Assessments. These central government metrics allow a summary position to be determined for each authority which is provided at the end of each table. A more detailed summary for each authority is provided within this study as Appendix A. The narrative produced from the transcriptions of each strategic informant semi structured interview from the associated authority has been analysed to draw possible links in regard to perceptions of ambition, levels of autonomy and the freedom to operate of the operational employees and managers. The full transcriptions of these interviews are provided within this study as Appendix C.

In order to formulate any specific theories from this data it is important to consider the various elements or 'forces' which may contribute to those theories. It would be relatively straightforward to deal with each authority individually and thus attempt to draw out possible scenarios in regard to the impact empowerment may have had. This approach would not provide the detailed analysis that a cumulative analysis could offer. Thus by identifying and contrasting the forces at play within the authorities it enables a more holistic view to be established. Certain questions need posed in order to determine whether the necessary drivers are in place that would facilitate an empowerment strategy and also to determine whether it is being adopted as a strategy or merely as a tool by individual officers outside of any corporate direction.

Is there evidence of a corporate commitment to improve environmental services standards within this authority?

Each council has a statutory duty to improve its services. The LGMA and associated policy and guidance make explicit reference to this requirement. From the interviews however only one manager stated that one of their key responsibilities was to improve the services. The vast majority however did state that they were expected to deliver a high standard of service. The best supporting evidence of a corporate commitment comes from the inspection reports however it is likely that that level of detail may not be made generally available to front line staff.

Are all staff aware of the Council's stated ambition?

One of the interview questions specifically asked whether they felt they were working for a high performing and ambitious council. The higher the level of the Officer asked the more positive the response. Conversely the closer you get to the front line service delivery the more negative responses were forthcoming. Could this be that the vision gets diluted as it is progressed down the structure? The Audit Commission make express statements in regard to a Council's ambition with the vast majority having a vision which generally includes objectives though not necessarily SMART objectives. (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Timely). No Officer rhymed off the vision or ambition but in general terms had a perception of working for an ambitious council.

Are all staff aware of the agreed service standards they should be delivering?

This is probably one of the main areas of concern. Although Service Heads and Service Managers could happily rhyme off Best Value Performance Indicators as well as the recently introduced National Indicators, as you got closer to the front line the knowledge of these performance indicators was less well known and in some cases not known at all. Front line operatives in five of the ten sample authorities namely A,C,G,H and K were unable to refer to any standards at all. It would be difficult if not impossible to determine an objective measurement of service improvement if you are not aware of a base line position or an agreed standard or level of service in the first place. No Officer questioned whether these National Indicators were indeed appropriate standards to work to or whether they were

happy accepting that a target is an appropriate measure. Goodharts law? Despite central government's policy of community involvement and delivering bespoke services there was no indication given of any locally agreed standards of service. In many interviews a measure of the perceived quality of the service was directly related to the number of complaints received. The lower the complaints the better the quality of service! No Officer at any level suggested any systemic failures to which a sustainable solution could be considered. The response to complaints was just to "send the lads back round to fix it".

Are all staff aware of the relevant central government targets?

Service Heads, Service Managers and Operational Managers were generally aware of central government targets in regard to BVPI's and NI's. Knowledge of central government targets in regard to savings and efficiencies were not well known in the interview group at any level. As with other targets and standards there was evidence of a knowledge, or information vacuum between the manager / supervisors and those delivering the service on the ground.

If staff believe they are empowered is it implicit or explicit?

The literary experts can not agree on a single definition of empowerment so it was safe to assume that out of twenty eight interviews could come the same number of definitions. Service Heads and Service Managers were all aware of empowerment from either management development courses or literature. At those levels they had no problem with offering a range of definitions.

It's about getting people to take responsibility for things. Rather than saying I need you to do this they would take responsibility for it and want to do it. And I feel that if I am to empower the lads and give them a little bit of responsibility it make them perform better.

It means passing on responsibility to perhaps and trusting staff beneath you to take various tasks off you.

Well to me I look at it in the way of an individual being given, you know, being instilled with some confidence and flexibility about how they carry out

these activities and give them the opportunity to make suggestions and change things because to me they are probably the experts.

Well in fact it is the way we are trying to move our services now. It is giving people the responsibility and the freedom to deliver, its really about delivering outcomes to some extent outputs and giving the individual to some extent the greater freedom in how they deliver that.

Well I empower my staff, my staff quite a lot well what it means to me is that my line manager empowers me to do my work and just to get on with it without having to be controlled.

It's the buzz word at the moment empowerment. What it means to me is that my supervisors I let them get on with the job. It is their job to make sure it works properly and the same with the team leaders.

I would describe it as giving another person who works for you the where with all to take control of the job they are doing.

At front line service delivery level however many had not come across the term at all.

From the Audit Commission inspections and assessments explicit reference to empowerment as a strategy was reported in several authorities.

Authority A

'the Inspectors made specific reference to an empowered workforce saying that staff felt free to try new ways of working'

Managers encouraged staff to be self-starters and to try out new approaches

Authority B

'The council had an open leadership and management style that positively promoted the active exchange of ideas of information. The council encouraged innovation by introducing a staff ideas scheme called 'Bright Ideas'.

Authority C

‘Each working under an area supervisor they would have autonomy to deliver the service in the best way possible in accordance with a performance specification’.

‘Survey results indicated staff felt trusted and empowered to do their jobs, and to make decisions’

Authority E

‘The Inspectors judged the leadership and management style to be “*open and empowering*” Staff were encouraged to test out new ideas and learn from professional networks’.

Authority G

‘Management activities such as ‘the modern empowered manager’ and ‘inspirational leadership’ had taken place for senior managers and capacity of middle managers was being systematically developed through a structured programme of assessment and coaching’.

‘staff were being encouraged to contribute to the development of solutions and freed to make change’.

Authority J

‘the teams had a degree of autonomy making day to day decisions at local level. In addition, four ‘hit teams’ removed fly tips and responded to customer complaints.’

‘The tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council’s values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff’.

There was a keenness and enthusiasm at Service Head and Service Manager level to show both knowledge and support for empowerment and all claimed to be empowered by their line managers as well as claiming that they empower their immediate subordinates. The common contradictory thread was a need to retain control by ensuring any suggestions for ways to change the way things were done were to be run by them first so that they could decide whether or not they could be implemented.

Authority B

"I think a manager who is more involved and more keeping an eye on making sure standards are being maintained and constantly mentioning things. I think that would be a better result for the service and for the team. Better for me possibly not but I would sooner have a manager that was more interested and more involved in day to day matters and what was going off and constantly reminding people of quality standards and things like that. I think that would be better for the service and for the teams and for everyone really".

Authority C

"A little bit of freedom is good but too much freedom you can soon end up not having the control. I feel as a manager or supervisor, you have got to feel that you have got some kind of control and that is not being a sort of control freak or trying to bully people you just feel if you are taking the flack from above so you need to know things are getting done the way you think they should be done or in a manner that is acceptable".

"Yeah – I think we've got quite a bit of that (Empowerment) to be honest with you. If we do want to change something obviously we will run it past him and then he says yay or nay. (Yes or No)"

"There is quite a lot of freedom to do that. Although if it does influence procedures and practices that have been done for some time they do have

to check to ensure that it doesn't affect everything else. They do tend to feed back through me".

"They will say to us "I think it's better if we do such a street at such a time or in the afternoon or morning". We will listen to that and say try it. It's nothing set in concrete. If there is a better way then we are always willing to try it".

Authority F

"I do like to be able to change and adapt things and have a reasonable amount of control over what I am doing. I think sometimes it doesn't do people any harm to be told either. You need boundaries. You have got to have some".

"I think I could change as much as I wanted to really. If I thought you know within reason. The attitude of my line manager is you sort of run that job and deliver what we need delivering and if you need to make changes to things in order to do that then do them. So but obviously keep me informed".

"I give them freedom yes. If one of the lads comes to me and says for example we have got problems on such and such a round say the water board is in the way. So we are going to leave it till last tomorrow then I will say. "If you think it will work better like that then just do it".

"So do you find they would come to you first to okay it rather than just do it and tell you afterwards?"

"In the main but I have got a couple who will just go and do stuff but I will say hallo what's going off. Well I just thought. Oh did you now. Well let me know in future please".

Authority J

"If I want something done a particular way though I will tell them this is how I want it done".

"If they come up with an idea they are welcome to put it forward and it will be discussed. It won't be dismissed out of hand. It will be discussed and if it is a good idea then it will be trialled. I would never put anything in place straight off that has not been trialled first. I have been bitten once too often. They are always welcome to put suggestions though".

"I have got one supervisor who is frightened of making a decision. Stuff that he should be dealing with on a daily basis he comes to me with. I think I need to step back a little bit".

"So from your perspective would you say you empower your teams"
Yes I would yes. I mean if someone comes up and says "I want to change it" then they will run it through me and I will say right. I mean me personally I would say I don't care how you do it as long as it gets done. As long as it is efficient and value for money and no-one is taking the piss.

"Would you expect them to check it over with your first?"

Yes

Who is responsible for deciding how the work is to be carried out?

Although the vast majority of front line staff were happy to accept the responsibility of deciding how the work should be carried out and in general the Supervisors agreed with that stance there was little evidence that the Supervisors would actually leave them to get on with it. Having to be kept informed and the need to post inspect suggests a need to exert control.

Authority A

"As part of our job we have to go out and monitor. But because of the amount of paperwork we have to do you don't get out as much as you would like. It's my job to go out and monitor what they have already done, and where they have been and where they haven't been. They could be leaving the bins in the driveway with lids upside down, paper everywhere, and spillages everywhere"

Authority B

"I used to have a lot more time to Supervise and get out there and make sure things got done"

"I think staff were aware that I could turn up at any location at any minute but now I am just chained to my desk doing everything on the phone which isn't good".

Authority C

"Well they know we are going to be checking so they have to do it. If we are not happy then we send them back. If we find an area that is not up to what we want doing then obviously we will instruct them to go back and do it again. We check it you see through the day".

Authority H

"I need to delegate more and I don't. Not because I think I need to keep things it's just that I am a perfectionist and I want things to go right and sometimes I have difficulty leaving go of the reins and letting people have their lead but I do try."

"To make sure that the work is carried out we will do inspections. Team inspections to check the quality of the work".

Many of those interviewed had experienced the days of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). Despite the move away from that by combining client and contractor into an integrated service provider this need to post inspect is a throw back to those days. It would suggest that although the work groups were now working together that the CCT culture still remained in some cases.

What other forces are evidently present that may impact on the changes in the quality of the service provision?

An empowerment strategy in isolation may not be solely responsible for changes in performance. Several interviewees commented on other recent changes including a

new Chief Executive, a restructure, increased resources, and training. The possible impact of those forces on the quality of the service is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & ELABORATION

6.1 Links to Literature Review

The literature review contains several definitions of empowerment ranging from John Tschohl, (1998) President of the Service Quality Institute in America who defines empowerment as a condition where any employee can do whatever he or she has to do on the spot to take care of a customer to the customer's satisfaction - not to the company's satisfaction at one extreme to Bowen and Lawler, (1991) who suggest that empowerment is defined as "management strategies for sharing decision making power" at the other end of the spectrum. Many authors settle for a simpler definition, one that has a practical understanding to most managers. Barbee and Bott, (1991) define empowerment as being "the act of vesting substantial responsibility in the people nearest the problem".

The primary research interviewees in general defined empowerment in broadly similar terms to Biohowiak, (2008)

“empowered employees exercise their freedom to act within their area of competence in order to satisfy customer needs”.

One issue to consider is whether or not empowerment is a useful strategy for this particular type of service. Some writers argue that empowerment is more appropriate where there is task complexity. It is argued that appropriate levels and types of empowerment given to employees must depend on the degree of task complexity (or variability) involved in delivering the services combined with the complexity (or variability) of customer needs. The task complexity and variability will determine the level and appropriateness of any empowerment strategy. (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1998). Generally the greater the task variety the greater is the need to empower employees.

Green (1997) suggests that some writers argue that all tasks however straight forward can also be improved by empowerment.

The "one best way" is referred to as being "McDonaldized" as it assists in the delivery of consistency and predictability of highly standardised processes and products to customers. (Ritzer, 1993)

The people who feel most threatened by empowerment are the middle and first line management. They have usually got where they are by using the skills of decision making and then directing and controlling their staff. They are being asked to stop behaving in this way, to hand their power over to their subordinates and to assume a role, which can often feel to be of lesser importance. They may worry *that there is little or nothing left for them to do* and they may be redundant. (Green, 1997). This argument is certainly evident in several of the sample authorities. However, if only the middle managers were interviewed it would be easy to draw a conclusion that empowerment is not only supported but practiced.

The final interview, the interview with the operative confirms views that this is the level where the link in the chain tends to break. Front line operatives either do not believe they are empowered or accept that being allowed to make minor decisions following line manager prior approval is empowerment. Yates et al, (2001) argues that the purpose of empowerment is not to give power to employees, but to take it away, to masquerade for greater managerial control over the nature and intensity of the work process

By the same token the line managers believe that process is also an example of them being empowering. This however may not be considered a problem if the end result is an improved service as well as satisfied and engaged employees but it can not be argued as examples of empowerment. When employees have to get permission for minor decisions, they are not empowered. (Davenport & Balcombe, 1994)

6.2 Research Findings

In regard to whether there has been a measurable improvement in service delivery over the life of the assessment regime there is empirical evidence to support this (Martin, 2008. Grace & Martin, 2008. Audit Commission, 2009).

Has empowerment been a factor in this improvement?

It has along with other factors according to (Martin, 2008. Grace and Martin 2008).

Have the sample authorities improved their environmental service delivery over the life of the assessment regime?

Yes only one had been judged to have made no or little improvement with the remaining nine showing a sustained improvement.

Can an empowerment strategy be shown to have contributed to this?

In seven of the ten authorities the Inspectors made specific reference to empowerment as one of the factors.

What was the view of the managers interviewed?

The senior and middle managers in the study group are all aware of the term empowerment and all were keen to express its virtues as an enabler to service improvement. Many said they had come across the term in management training. Senior and middle managers in the study group are convinced they are both empowered and empowering but there were few practical examples that could be quoted arising from the interviews to support this despite Audit Commission Inspectors making specific reference to examples of empowerment in sample authorities A,B,C,D,E,G and J that this was a formal strategy adopted on a corporate basis. There was strong evidence of a desire to retain control whilst still wanting to be viewed as an empowering manager.

What was the view of the front line operatives interviewed?

This was mixed with the majority having little or no knowledge of the term empowerment. When given a definition the majority view was that they were not empowered or that they considered being able to put forward a proposal to do things differently which needed the okay from their line manager before implementation as being empowered. This model was also seen by some line managers as empowering. Involvement in the decision making process was also seen by managers as empowering and by the front line employees as being empowered. Any increased involvement in the decision making process was welcomed by the majority of the front line employees interviewed but even within the same authority there were opposing perceptions between line management and operatives on whether they were being empowered. This is a key issue and would benefit from further research.

In the context of the research question;

Can empowered and empowering employees in local government have a positive impact on service improvement?

The academic literature, the central government policy papers as well as the views of the managerial levels within the sample authorities all support the view that empowerment can have a positive impact on performance and service quality. From

a line manager's perspective they would appear to want to be seen to agree with this proposal. The research suggests that empowerment can mean different things to different people and this therefore enables a manager to support empowerment in a manner that they see fits with their interpretation of the term. However the study findings also suggest that an empowerment strategy does not work in isolation. Academic literature as well as central government policy documents also point to the following drivers to service improvement;

- Levels of and opportunities for innovation.
- Style of leadership.
- Employee engagement and commitment.
- Task Complexity.
- Corporate ambition.
- External constraints.
- Resources.
- Training.

Some or all of these drivers are evident in the sample authorities both from assessment reports as well as interview data. This particular study and methodology does not however provide the facility to measure the specific impact of each of these drivers making it therefore difficult to assess the benefit or indeed possible disbenefit arising solely from empowerment. There is however clear belief as well as support for empowerment at a managerial level in the whole of the study group. Not one dissenting voice was evident.

Central government has not sought to specifically measure the effectiveness of an empowerment strategy in isolation.

The research findings also suggest that there are many interpretations of empowerment with the most common understanding being simply the opportunity to change the way things are done but only after prior consultation with line managers. This is probably the weakest definition of the term. Line managers in the study group wanted to voice support for empowerment but in reality their actions fell short of an explicit strategy with a clear definition. Involvement in decision making by the front line employees was evident but surely falls short of a declaration of

empowerment. The golden thread of empowerment appears to be dangled just out of reach of this group.

6.3 Relevance of Findings

Limited research has been undertaken specifically in regard to employee empowerment in local government however Davenport & Balcombe, (1994) undertook a study on behalf of The Local Government Management Board. They defined empowerment of employees as giving decision-making power to people at or near the front line often involving giving people or teams jobs with a wider scope rather than simply handling a small part of the process.

They proposed that organisations introduce empowerment in order to improve customer service and to reduce costs and that empowerment was usually accompanied by de-layering resulting in a flatter structure

A strong value system is necessary in order to define the boundaries of freedom for employees.

Two themes that emerge strongly from this study were the need for strong leadership at the top of the organisation and for individual training and development.

Leadership being needed not just to drive in empowerment but to maintain it. There is less distinction between the roles of first line leaders and middle managers as traditional supervisory roles disappear. Fewer managers are needed but the leadership role of those who remain is essential. There is a major investment in training and development, so that people are willing and able to grasp the full benefits of empowerment.

Empowerment also implies an ongoing commitment to developing employees' skills.

General Managers of two large direct service organisations defined empowerment as a mechanism to give accountability as near as possible to where it should be in terms of making things happen. David Stapleton, Director of Community Services at South Somerset District Council, called it 'a common sense approach to management and getting things done'. (Davenport & Balcombe, 1994)

The 1994 case studies indicated the importance of strong leadership, not simply for the vision, energy and determination to drive in empowerment initially, but for the constant emphasis on adhering to the values. In each of the case studies empowerment had not arisen from employee demand, but had been initiated from the top.

Davenport & Balcombe, (1994) suggest that it is unlikely that empowerment will happen merely if a leader says, 'I empower you to take power'. Rather it seems that there must be a great deal of persuasion, training, clarity of vision and consistency of purpose to encourage people to take more responsibility and their managers to live with the culture change.

This raises a question of what might happen in an empowered organisation if the quality of leadership were to deteriorate, for instance, on the succession of a new leader. One manager felt that organisational change was like a wet sponge. It is okay as long as you keep the pressure on. As soon as you let go, the water comes back. This is one possibility – a revert to type scenario, with a return to traditional ways of managing. Another possibility is that the empowered organisation could slip over the narrow line to anarchy with the values no longer providing a clear sense of direction.

All of the 1994 case study organisations asserted that empowerment could only succeed within a strong framework of organisational value. The senior management should look after the corporate whole by establishing the bottom line on certain key issues, such as equal opportunities and customer care. Employees could then recognise the boundaries and framework within which they have the power to make decisions and understand that they are not empowered to override overall policy.

Empowerment and organisational structure have a complex and varied relationship particularly in a local government context. In some cases, the decision to empower staff can force delayering and lateral networking upon the organisation. In other cases, delayering the management structure and flattening the hierarchies in order to reduce costs often requires empowerment of the remaining staff. A third variant is that delayering can be a tool used specifically in order to introduce empowerment.

The effect of empowerment on the role of senior managers can however create conflict and dilemmas. Empowerment presupposes that all current managers are engaged or can be tuned in to the empowerment wavelength. It is important to recognise that individuals adapt at different paces to change in general and to empowerment particularly.

Several managers at two of the organisations, who were unable or unwilling to change left the authority, several taking early retirement. It is not always possible or advisable to dismiss those whose behaviour cannot be changed. In some cases there is a policy of no redundancy and a sense of loyalty towards long-standing employees.

In one organisation, after the introduction of empowerment and an initial reappraisal of ill-suited middle managers, it was pledged that all the rest would remain. This promise may not have been completely advisable, but the council decided to live up to it and live with it.

Another dilemma for the role of senior managers is their treatment of those middle and junior managers who argue that if they are empowered they can run their own departments as they wish, even in a non-empowering style. A possible solution might be found in the organisation's values, which should state the expected management style.

The role of the middle manager in an empowered organisation has been difficult to define. It has changed so dramatically that many managers have been unable to adapt. Those that have, however, have felt "liberated" by the new concepts that accompany empowerment.

This 1994 study did go some way to determining a link between empowerment in a public sector environment and service delivery performance improvement by asking;

"How are performance and targets affected by empowerment?"

How do empowered organisations deal with the poor performance of teams or of individuals within the teams? Several local authorities were using an appraisal process as a means of dealing with those issues. Some of the management literature, specifically W.E. Deming's work on quality, argues that appraisal is

divisive and de-motivating because it tends to focus on ranking people. (Deming, 1986). Yet this argument misunderstands the developmental aspects of appraisal and the fact that it should focus only one-third on past performance and experience and two thirds on future goals training and development.

In the 1994 case study organisations, clarity and action had accompanied empowerment on standards of performance. Davenport & Balcombe, (1994).

The study concluded by proposing an Empowerment Checklist relevant to Local Government. This formed part of the Belgrave papers No 11 issued in 1994 and is produced below.

- The people actually doing the work make decisions about the work is done and also use their discretion to improve service to the customer.
- The impetus for empowerment usually comes from the top.
- It needs to be taken up and made real by the middle management if it is To have real impact at the front line.
- Some senior and middle managers are likely to be casualties – by their choice or the organisation's – because they cannot live with the changes.
- The empowered organisation has fewer levels and at every level there are fewer managers and supervisors.
- The role of managers, with their larger and more diverse teams, is increasingly to lead rather than to manage. Planning, controlling, ordering supplies or equipment, dealing with suppliers, making decisions about customers and many other managerial duties are done by the empowered front line staff or first line leaders. The main task which remains, s to lead people by enthusing them with clear values and clear objectives.
- There is a need for a strong vision and/or set of values to hold the organisation together and to provide clear guidelines empowered employees.

- These values usually include caring for customers and for employees and is often exemplified by an improvement in the physical working environment and increased opportunity for the employees' personal development.
- These values need continuous reinforcement both by communication and by senior management example.
- There is a tendency for people to be multi-skilled within the team and for decisions about the allocation of work to be taken by the team itself.
- The role of the first line leader is changed. He/she no longer 'supervises', checking and allocating work, but is more involved with coaching and developing employees to do their own checking.
- Enormous emphasis is placed on training and development of managers and employees, as a tool for cultural change. Managers' training focuses on leadership and a real understanding of the values, together with the behaviour implied by those values. Employee's training includes broadening their range of skills, with an emphasis on customer care and a broad range of communication and interpersonal skills. There is emphasis on continuous learning and development.
- Teams meet regularly to review performance and discuss potential improvements. These meetings often include annual off-site sessions, enabling a longer perspective to be taken on the team's work.
- Ideas and innovations are welcomed, not only within the team but also more widely throughout the organisation, and communication channels exist to capture and investigate these ideas.
- There is a considerable direct lateral communication across the organisation as people or teams make relationships with internal customers, suppliers and colleagues doing similar work. Communication does not have to go via managers,.

- There is little fear in the organisation and a presumption of trust. Managers exist to support the front line staff rather than to check on them. Mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities and people feel able to express their views and point out problems without fear of retribution.
- At the same time, there is clarity about what is expected of employees.
- Empowered organisations are egalitarian in spirit.

Research undertaken in Canada during 1990 through to 2002 examined to what extent service delivery in the Canadian federal government actually improved after a decade of reform efforts, and how employee empowerment accounted for any improvements that arose. (Foley, 2007). Whether or not service quality improved in Canada over the period 1990-2002, and to what degree employee empowerment could be credited with any improvements in service delivery that did arise, were some of the issues addressed. The research drew on focus group data collected as part of a nationally funded study examining the impacts, on social development and well-being, of the application of efficiency-based notions of productivity to service work. In providing a theoretical underpinning for the paper, the various meanings attached to empowerment, why it can be viewed both favourably and unfavourably in a service context and should possibly be viewed with scepticism in relation to current public sector reforms, were reviewed.

In considering Empowerment and service quality Foley (2007) commented that empowering front-line workers had frequently been seen as conducive to improving service delivery, based on the belief that the people closest to the customer are in the best position to exercise discretion to ensure customer's needs are met. The study found little evidence that employee commitment was secured through incentives. The Canadian government seems to have sought to gain employer commitment via coercion rather than incentive, judging by the methods utilised.

In the case of the front-line workers, commitment was secured via the introduction of a management control system that provided employees with immediate feedback on whether or not they were meeting their goals. This put them in a constant state of anxiety, over whether they would be able to keep their jobs. In the case of the indirect service deliverers, commitment was secured by communicating to them the necessity for meeting vaguely-defined government goals, and providing some

measure of support as they tried to interpret the goals and the means to the goals, while holding them accountable for outcomes even their managers could not have guaranteed. In neither case could the employees opt out of or modify their performance standards, regardless of how they felt about them. In addition, contrary to the recommendations of Lashley, (1999) and others, no provision was made to ensure that employees did benefit from these initiatives, and budget allocations were sufficient to enable goals to be met except by making employees do more with less, intensifying their work.

All of this suggests that productivity and efficiency rather than the enhancement of employee welfare was at the heart of this initiative. Thus it is not surprising that employees were not duped into believing they were being empowered. However the lack of empowerment, according to the literature (Schneider and Bowen, 1993), should then have affected their commitment to good service delivery, which according to the data did not appear to have happened. Despite the typical unreliability of self-reports, the level of frustration evident throughout the transcripts obtained throughout the research lends credence to the proposition that these employees were strongly motivated by the desire to serve their clients. They therefore accepted the imposed performance goals and worked hard to achieve them, even though the result was heavier workloads, impaired work-life balance, stress and anxiety.

6.4 Synthesis

Improvement in service delivery from the public sector is no longer optional. The government's modernisation agenda, introduction of Best Value and rigorous inspection and assessment from the Audit Commission make service delivery improvements compulsory through legislation. The legislation focuses clearly on customer engagement and inclusive consultation. This is to ensure service delivery improvements are centred on customer needs and desires. There are many contributing factors an organisation must consider before progressing any empowerment strategy. It is however necessary to be aware of the limitations of the primary data when making any judgements or synthesis.

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH CONCLUSION

7.1 Implications of the Study

Important theoretical, practical and future research implications arise as a result of this study. The study contributes not only to existing empowerment literature but also to the specific impact of empowerment in a public service environment. More specifically it is important because it focuses on a service area that is experienced and used by the vast majority of citizens. The impact of poor or declining environmental services as well as high quality and improving environmental services is immediately noticeable by all that experience it. It is a service where a strategy of empowerment should bring about a noticeable change in quality. The findings support the assumption that an empowered and empowering workforce can contribute to service improvement and also support the assumptions that other key drivers must also be in place to enable and facilitate that improvement.

The results of the study also pose further challenges to practitioners and researchers alike in that although this study will remain a source of knowledge to the researcher and academics in the field of empowerment and the measurement of public service delivery improvement. It can also provide a source of knowledge on other factors that impact on the quality of the service including employee engagement and commitment towards their particular organisation.

For example the higher up the management structure the greater the apparent buy in to the vision and ambition of the organisation compared to the front line delivery employees who still exhibit deference to the authority of line management. The higher up the management structure in public service organisations the greater the rewards not only in terms and conditions but in salaries compared to the front line delivery employees. That knowledge has implications for engagement and thus implications for the success of any empowerment strategy. These intrinsic factors demand an organisation to consider its overall people management strategy.

7.2 Research Recommendations

The research findings are significant.

The research outcomes are meaningful providing factors that require further explanation in order to develop what is already known in order to contribute further to the knowledge of empowerment as a strategy to improve performance in service delivery within the public sector. The subject has not been subject to critical review in recent times. The literature shows a lack of consensus both in application and

definition. The literature expounding a factored link to other identified key drivers is limited and would therefore benefit from specific study.

A study using a similar process would assist with the knowledge, study and perception of the impact of the other identified factors such as engagement, leadership, resources, rewards that contribute to the performance level of the organisation.

This study therefore recommends that to effectively measure the impact of empowerment on service quality future research should.

1. Identify the theoretical knowledge underpinning other contributory factors.
2. Identify the significance and possible hierarchy of all contributory drivers, including empowerment on other services.
3. Extend the study to other more complex services.
4. Develop statistical and quantitative scales to measure the impacts.
5. Test the statistical and quantitative scales.
6. Examine findings and compare results.

7.3 Research Original Contribution

The research supports the NBS Organisational and Individual Performance research theme. There have been limited studies to determine the impact of empowerment on public service delivery. The most recent UK study being some 15 years ago in 1994 by Davenport and Balcombe which was prior to the introduction of a target driven performance framework. That study however this did not relate the strategy to any accepted improvement metrics but concentrated instead on the impact on the employees. The most recent comparative study by Foley 2007 considered empowerment in a public service setting in Canada and this also was unrelated to a comparable performance framework.

This research is significantly different to both of those studies and has contributed to research knowledge in the following ways,

It represents the first study of a specific public service deriving rich data through semi-structured interviews involving three reporting levels of an operational structure within each of the ten sample authorities. This enabled the relationships between those reporting levels to be studied.

The study explored the perceptions of how an empowerment strategy could impact on service delivery improvement.

The study is current and has run in parallel with central government's Local Government Modernisation Agenda from the Best Value Regime of 1999 to the introduction of Comprehensive Area Assessment in 2009. The majority of those interviewed have been in post during this period and therefore key players in the performance of the environmental service delivery within those councils. The audit inspection assessments during this period are therefore directly related to the operational performance of the interviewees in question. This has enabled comparative metrics to be considered against data collected from the interviews. The data arising from the interviews is therefore relevant to central government's modernisation agenda.

The employees understanding of empowerment has been explored in detail along with the interpretation of empowerment from the aspect of senior management, middle management and front line employee. Central government have not sought to determine whether there is a common understanding of empowerment at an operational level.

The identification of other contributory factors to improvement has opened up opportunities for future related research.

Despite central government's stated belief in the value of empowerment it has not commissioned any research into the resultant impact of empowerment on a specific key service or whether local authorities have in fact implemented empowerment as a strategy to facilitate improved performance.

The study has provided an insight into employee perceptions of the value of empowerment at three operating levels within the organisations.

7.4 Research Limitations

The research has concentrated on qualitative methods in order to explore human behaviour. Quantitative methods were also adopted to a minor degree in order to gauge improvements or failings in the quality of the service. The interpretivist approach is considered valid however it could be argued that the applied use of combined methods would benefit with an increase in the quantitative elements. This would add to the available metrics and permit the development of statistical models measuring the impact of empowerment, and indeed any other drivers that contribute to the service delivery improvement and quality.

The sample size was considered valid for this study. The ten sample authorities were drawn from a family group. The service chosen was comparable being that of environmental maintenance, the interviewees were of similar levels within each structure. However, the performance “journey” of the ten sample authorities may not be considered varied enough. This could not have been prescribed or selected at the start of the study in 2004 as the performance “journey” ran in parallel with the life of the study.

It did though have the advantage that the majority of those key informants interviewed were in post and therefore influential in that performance journey.

The study dealt with a specific public service only. Generalisation should not be encouraged in regard to similar perceptions on the value and impact of empowerment on other specific services. Future research relating to other services would be required to inform this.

The key informants selected by the organisations were interviewed by means of semi-structured interviews. Despite the promises of confidentiality it is possible that in such an exposed arena that the views expressed may have been tainted with a belief that no such non-attribution would be guaranteed. The use of a confidential scalar questionnaire may have provided differing views. This approach however would not have resulted in the richness and volume of data provided by face to face interviews which is the main strength of this study.

7.5 Future Research

The literature review includes works relating to the concepts and definitions of various empowerment strategies. This has highlighted important variables. The literature review is supported throughout the study by the author’s position as a

practitioner-researcher, which provides up to date working knowledge of both local government and environmental service provision. A study undertaken by Pitts (2005) built on previous research on empowerment by creating a model that explained why some managers empower their employees and some do not. However he concluded by stating that empowerment research has been characterised as underdeveloped (Spreitzer, 1995) and suggested that future research should look to examine the relationship between empowerment and performance, seeking to understand whether organisations with managers who empower are more or less effective than those with managers who do not. This study seeks to develop that gap in current research in the specific area of local authority environmental service delivery.

The study would suggest that the greatest challenge for any researcher exploring the impact of empowerment is that of isolating empowerment from the other associated and contributory factors.

‘The links between devolution to the frontline and service improvement is an area that requires further research’. (Martin and Bovaird, 2005).

Furthermore the measurement of service improvement in a public service context is somewhat different to acknowledged measurements of service improvements in the private sector.

As public service finances are put under more pressure than less employees will be employed to deliver the services. There is still a drive to improve these services in spite of reducing resources. Councils will need to be more innovative with flatter structures. The culture and autonomy of the workforce will become more important and it could be argued that empowerment will be expected to play a greater part in the delivery of those services.

This study and further studies could therefore inform central government in respect to the true impact of the various identified factors including empowerment on service delivery.

Outcomes from such studies could improve the volume and quality of knowledge and literature relating to the impact of empowerment and other drivers.

The relevance of such knowledge is important as it will assist central government and local government to understand the relevance of adopting or not adopting an empowerment strategy. It will assist central government and local government to understand the importance of other factors associated with an empowerment strategy as identified already in the literature and the primary data collection.

This study contributes to that debate substantially however, it still leaves questions unanswered which become essentially questions for further research.

The issues requiring that further research are whether empowerment is a key factor in the drive for service delivery improvement or whether it plays only a minor part in that process.

Whether empowerment is a key factor in the drive for service delivery improvement in standard basic services or would prove of greater influence if adopted as a strategy in the delivery of more complex services.

Research to uncover empirical answers to those questions could lead to knowledge in yet unexplored areas of empowerment across other services and other work groups.

The study also points towards a need for more specific research into apparent perception vacuums between middle management and front line employees. For example how can a middle manager be so certain in claims to be empowered and empowering of front line employees when the front line employees are as certain in their belief that they are not being empowered.

Such additional studies would seek to further understand factors driving such perceptions to further extend available knowledge on employee empowerment.

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Abbreviations / Definition of Terms

AC	Audit Commission
AIM	Advanced Institute of Management
APSE	Association for Public Service Excellence
BERR	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
BVUSS	Best Value User Satisfaction Survey
BV	Best Value
BVPI	Best Value Performance Indicator
BVR	Best Value Review
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CE	Chief Executive
CIPFA	The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
DIUS	Department for Innovation Universities and Skills
DEFRA	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of Transport Environment and the Regions
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
IDEA	The Improvement and Development Agency
LPI	Local Performance Indicator
LPSA	Local Public Service Agreement
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
LGMA	Local Government Modernisation Agenda
LGA	Local Government Association
LA	Local Authority
LAA	Local Area Agreement
MLQ	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
MP	Member of Parliament
NAO	National Audit Office
NWEO	North West Employers Organisation
NI	National Indicator
NIES	National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

OPSR	Office for Public Sector Reform
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PWC	Price Waterhouse Cooper
UK	United Kingdom

Appendices

Appendix A - Audit Commission Inspection Summaries

Authority A

In September 2002 the Council's Street Cleaning service was inspected. The Service reviewed consisted of street cleaning, including cleaning highways and the City centre, fly-tipping clearance, gully cleaning and weed control on highways, litter bins and graffiti removal. The service was judged to be a 'good', two-star service that has 'promising' prospects for improvement. With regard to quality of service provision and employee attitude and autonomy the Inspectors made the following observations;

- They found that the streets were clean and tidy throughout and this Service was provided at a reasonable cost;
- there were clear departmental aims and challenging targets for service delivery and the Street Cleaning Service was aware of its role in delivering corporate objectives;
- in the City centre, night-time cleansing plus litter picking throughout the day, along with regular removal of graffiti and fly-posting, meant that the area was clean throughout the day;
- Fly tips were being cleared quickly as well as litter hot spots and overall satisfaction at this time was within the top 25 per cent of English authorities

However this was not a consistent picture throughout the service with some evidence of poor quality namely;

- Some road gullies had not been cleaned for two years
- Abandoned cars, fly tipping and graffiti was found in one particular location, that had not been cleaned as well as alleyways that were overgrown and littered with broken glass and broken glass in parks. These were an eye-sore for people living nearby.
- Waste was apparent in front gardens where people either could not or would not either pay for its collection or take it to the Civic Amenity Site.

In summary the Inspectors found the service to be focussed almost entirely on clearing up litter rather than its prevention. The Inspectors also considered that there were parts of the Council that were not effectively working together and

that impacted on the level of service. They did report some examples of co-operative working but felt the improvement plan would not do enough to improve the co-ordination and efficiency of joint working with other Council cleaning services.

- Regular performance monitoring was being used to help redirect resources to ensure that the Service remained responsive and the Service was found to have a good history of delivering service improvements.
- In regard to staff motivation they found them to be committed to delivering the improvements;

The Council's had a stated vision to become a city where people would be proud to live; and a Council where people were also proud to work.'

Although the role of street cleaning in the department's work was clear, the Inspectors found no specific stated aim for the Street Cleaning Service to describe what the service does and why it does it.

The Inspectors found some examples of empowerment with the street cleaning crews working on patches and being responsible for keeping their own areas clean. There was no rigid cleaning schedule and areas were cleaned as and when required. The crews also removed some fly posting and graffiti when they came across it.

This resulted in a city centre that was clean and free of litter, graffiti and fly posting. The result of this approach was appreciated by the public with 66 per cent being satisfied with the cleanliness of the City in 2000/01.

More effective monitoring and performance management had enabled the Council to move away from simple programmed cleaning and develop a more flexible approach; cleaning where and when it was needed. A number of locations were cleared of fly tipping rapidly without the Council having received a complaint about the fly tipping this was further evidence of autonomous action.

There were however specific areas where the Council did not work to keep the area clean and failed in its objective to make the area 'a great place to live'. The street cleaning crew told the Inspectors of fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and graffiti which had not been cleaned. The focus group told the Inspectors of alleyways that were overgrown and littered with glass and graffiti. This suggests an inconsistent

approach to the way different crews were operating within the same service and despite the waste disposal, waste collection and street cleaning being delivered by the same department within the Council, the Inspectors found little evidence of the Services being delivered in a joined up manner.

The contractor's cleaning staff reported numerous detailed issues that they felt the Council or their own management could improve. Despite being asked for their views many of the views reported did not find their way into the improvement plan.

This was confirmed by the Inspectors who stated that the Improvement plan had failed to fully address the evident separate working of other section, apart from those which are already under the same line management. They made specific reference to the need for greater co-ordination of and joint working between, all the Councils' activities and indicated that there had been an amount of compartmentalised thinking in the past, to the detriment of more effective working.

In the Corporate Assessment Report of January 2008 the Inspectors found the Council to be performing well with staff benefiting from good workforce planning, performance management, engagement and training.

The responsive multi-agency neighbourhood team system that had been piloted in priority neighbourhoods was providing an immediate and local response to residents' problems such as dog fouling and uneven pavements. Good use of neighbourhood managers meant residents could successfully use a single point of contact for many of their concerns.

Staff at all levels were benefiting from a strong but supportive managerial lead, comprehensive training and flexible working arrangements. The Council had robust strategies and plans to appraise performance, develop skills and succession plan.

Following on from the service review of 2002 the Inspectors made specific reference to an empowered workforce saying that staff felt free to try new ways of working, an example being the frontline staff forum had developed a toolkit available in booklet and video form for dealing with difficult customers. Consequently, staff were committed, enthusiastic, responsive and capable, with good morale, low turnover and below average sickness absence.

A strong culture of performance management was developing at all levels with well embedded systems and processes holding services to account for their performance and helping to shift resources in line with priorities.

Responsibilities for action were clear and well understood at all levels. This provided a clear sense of direction and clear accountability for delivery to staff. Once again the Inspectors reported a 'can do' culture which was helping drive staff to improve services.

Managers encouraged staff to be self-starters and to try out new approaches. Staff were getting regular and useful feedback from their line managers who were approachable and supportive. The staff understood the need to tailor delivery to meet local needs and the leadership actively promoted this culture.

These initiatives were producing year on year improvements with the percentage of PI above the median improving steadily since 2003/04.

Back in 2002 the Inspectors felt the Council were not making good use of metrics to track performance however they now found that the Council was using metrics well to track performance and set targets in order drive continuous improvement.

In the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of February 2008 the Inspectors felt that the Council was generally improving services in its priority areas, engaging well with local communities, and making services more accessible with public satisfaction above average. There were still some service areas where performance was less good, but the Council was in a position to identify these and to take action to improve them.

The Audit Commission's overall judgement at that time was that the service was improving well and they classified it as four stars in its level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This is a significant improvement on 2002 where the service was judged to be a 'good', two-star service that had 'promising' prospects for improvement.

A strong culture of performance management was developing at all levels, with well embedded systems and processes holding services to account for their

performance with the aim of driving continuous improvement and helping to shift resources in line with priorities.

In summary from 2002 to 2008 the Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Inspectors had identified examples of self-direction, accountability and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement.

Authority B

In December 2002 the Street Care Service was inspected and the Inspectors found that the to be a **“Good”**, two star, service which has **“Promising”** prospects for improvement

The service consists of:

- Sweeping and cleaning of highways, footpaths, car parks, grass verges, parks, playgrounds and other areas of Council-owned land.
- Removal of fly-tipped materials, fly posters, graffiti, chewing gum and abandoned vehicles.

The Inspectors believed the overall service to be a **good** one because:

- The Council had a clear corporate purpose and aims.
- There were clear service aims that reflected the corporate purpose.
- Staff morale had improved considerably over the past twelve months.
- The quality of the service to residents had improved over the past twelve months and overall the streets were clean.
- The service did not compare favourably with other Councils in 1999/2000. However, since that inspection the situation had improved.

The Inspectors believed the prospects for the service to improve were **promising**, because:

- Some improvements had already been made.
- There was a clear vision of where the Council wanted to get to and there was a commitment to get there.

However:

- The Council had not identified how it intends to reach the performance levels of the best performing councils with regards to fly tipping.

The Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2001/2002 described the Council's ambition as:

- Ensuring that this is a good place to live, work and visit, so everyone can enjoy a good quality of life.

The Council's stated aims for the Street care service were:

- To keep all relevant land, for which the Council is responsible, clear of litter and refuse.
- To maintain and cleanse litter bins, bus shelters and street signs.
- To remove fly tips, fly posters, graffiti and chewing gum.
- To maintain a street inspection service, and to be consistent and transparent in our enforcement actions.
- To organise clean-up campaigns of badly littered areas of land and to raise awareness of environmental issues amongst schoolchildren and young people.

The Council considered that keeping the District clean and tidy was one of its primary functions. Evidence provided to the Inspectors showed all areas to be predominantly 'grade A' standard. The Inspectors confirmed this to be true when they inspected the District. The percentage of streets classified as either grade A or B has risen from 86.8% to 93.2%.

Removal of the client/contractor split had allowed the Council to react quicker to service requests and respond to customer complaints. It had also helped to improve staff morale as they considered that they now get a quicker response to suggestions they put forward to management. However despite this statement appearing to support an empowering culture the Inspectors also found evidence that the service was still working to schedules set up during the time of CCT. Staff reported finding this frustrating particularly when they had to clean only certain streets on certain days in some of the villages. This fixed way of working resulted in streets being 'cleaned' according to the schedule, when they were already at a high or acceptable standard.

Following the Comprehensive performance assessment Inspection of May 2004 the Inspectors found the Council to be an excellent council which had laid robust foundations since the 2001 inspection to enhance the quality of services that local people receive.

The leadership and management style was now considered more open with systems in place to ensure that different participants could learn from each other's experiences.

Aims were again considered to be ambitious with priorities reflecting the national agenda as well as dealing with issues important to local people. The council had strong leadership and capable managers and staff. In regard to performance management the Inspectors found that both councillors and officers were clear about the corporate priorities and their roles and responsibilities for performance improvement in key areas.

A recent staff survey showed that staff had a high level of satisfaction with their work.

The comparative performance of the council, as measured by national performance indicators, at this time was about average. There was a low overall public satisfaction rate with council services including street cleanliness which was in the worst quartile.

However the introduction of self managing 'clean teams' and 'hit squads' by the council had helped to achieve significant improvements in the street scene with street cleanliness seeing an improvement from 93 per cent to 96 per cent high or acceptable standard. These teams respond instantly to complaints from residents and remove fly tipping, graffiti, and mark up abandoned cars and also address dog fouling and street cleaning priorities.

The council had an open leadership and management style that positively promoted the active exchange of ideas of information. The council encouraged innovation by introducing a staff ideas scheme called 'Bright Ideas'.

Morale was considered high with staff clear about corporate and service aims and their role and responsibilities in the achievement of these. This was an improvement since the last inspection where morale in some areas was low.

In the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter March 2008 the Inspectors felt that the Council had made good progress in 2007 in relation to its top priorities. In relation to national priorities, most of the Council's services were now performing well in comparison to other district councils, and performance indicators had continued to improve from an already high level of performance. The community's perception of

Council services was found to be generally positive. Public realm improvements had been achieved.

Performance of the Council as measured by Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) had continued to improve from an already high level of performance. In addition, the proportion of PIs that had improved over both one year and three years placed the Council amongst the best performing district councils in the country. This indicated that the Council was sustaining improvement relative to its own performance in previous years and was improving at a faster rate than other councils over the short and the longer term.

Authority C

In December 2001 the Council's Parks and Open Spaces Service was judged a **“fair” or one-star service** which would probably improve. With regard to quality of service provision and employee attitude and autonomy the Inspectors made the following observations;

- front line staff showed obvious commitment to the service and to customers;
- some prestige parks were maintained to a good standard and were well presented;
- play areas that had been refurbished were to a good standard;

However this was not a consistent finding in that;

- the standard of maintenance in other parks, recreation grounds and amenity areas was not as good;
- some play areas were poor; and
- Security, vandalism, dog fouling and litter were problems that needed to be resolved.

The Inspectors felt the parks and open spaces would **probably improve**. The Inspectors made this judgement based on several factors including;

- the service was establishing new working practices to improve grounds maintenance and the maintenance of buildings and paths;

However they also felt that

- more recently appointed operational staff may not have the skills to deliver the required standards;

The Council had set its vision as ‘a place where people aspired to live, enjoy working and loved visiting’ and the Council was ambitious with a mission statement to “work with a sense of pride”.

The grounds maintenance service at this time was delivered by the Council’s ‘in house’ contractor to a specification provided by another part of the Council which acted as the ‘client’.

These arrangements reflected the requirements of Compulsory Competitive Tendering where the ‘client’ was responsible for subjecting the specification to competitive tender, entering into a contract for normally between three and five

years with the successful bidder and monitoring the delivery of the service. The Council's in-house team was successful in winning the bids for grounds maintenance CCT work in 1992 and 1998. However, the post CCT era was looking at how the service could be provided using an integrated partnership

The service was delivered in accordance with a frequency-based specification, with a limited number of defined standards. The lack of defined standards meant the Council had not translated its aspirations into measurable prioritised achievement targets and it was therefore not clear what the service was expected to achieve making measurement and monitoring difficult. The Inspectors expressed concern that the aims focused on operational issues. This was considered to be inward looking thus limiting the extent to which public opinion and consultation could be used to inform future decisions and business planning. Checks showed that while prestige parks were fairly clean with only a little litter this was not the case in all the parks and open spaces thus reinforcing the inconsistent approach to quality. Specific observations confirmed that there were several examples of individual schemes that promoted a clean and safe environment for all users and had the potential to attract additional use; however the Inspectors found that the standard and quality of provision across the Borough was inconsistent.

The Inspectors found that staff were committed to providing a quality service. They saw the use of their skills and experience as fundamental to achieving this aim. While, generally staff were aware of the service aims and could provide anecdotal evidence about specific projects the Inspectors found evidence that staff felt that their potential contribution to meeting customer needs had not been maximised by the inflexibility of the specification, the previous duplication of monitoring and lack of investment of the CCT regime.

A number of user and community groups felt that council staff were generally helpful but that they were not always told what was happening or involved in improvement plans.

A survey by PRL Research Limited commissioned by the Council in January 2001 reported that 76 per cent of people were satisfied with the parks maintenance. Satisfaction with sports pitch maintenance was 41 per cent.

Customer satisfaction for parks and open spaces was average when compared to neighbouring authorities and with the whole of England.

The percentage of play areas meeting national standards was below average and needed to improve considerably (by nearly 20 per cent) to compare favourably with the top quartile for England.

The quality of grounds maintenance was again reported as inconsistent with the maintenance of buildings, paths, hard surfaces and many play areas reflecting long term lack of investment and neglect

The Inspectors found that generally both officers and members had a positive approach to best value and saw the process as a way of driving improvements. However best value had not been accepted by all management and staff as a part of the natural work pattern. The Inspectors found that some managers were resistant to change and saw best value as 'just another government scheme'.

From the Inspection interviews it was felt that staff and managers believed the best value review process allowed them to focus on what they were doing. These services encompassed staff who had been subject to Compulsory Competitive Tendering in the past and these staff groups and their managers particularly welcomed the opportunity to move away from this narrow approach and look more broadly at service delivery.

There were issues of low staff morale and a divide in the level of skills between the older, more experienced employees usually employed on full time contracts and the younger staff generally employed seasonally, who had few formal horticultural qualifications. The Council had recognised this imbalance and had outlined a training programme and apprentice training scheme to address this situation but it was felt this would take up to five years before it provided significant results that would impact on quality and standards in the parks and open spaces.

Allied to this training programme, the service looked positively at the post CCT environment and had created four area based self-directed work teams to provide a comprehensive grounds maintenance service. Each working under an area supervisor they would have autonomy to deliver the service in the best way possible in accordance with a performance specification. This was a clear statement of intent to move towards a culture of empowerment.

This creation of the work teams also meant a review of contract specifications with a move from frequency based operations such as cutting grass a specified number of times a season to meeting a performance standard set by the Council. It was felt the

self-directed work teams should help improve staff morale and release staff resources previously used to monitor compliance with the frequency specification to focus on delivering a service that met customer expectations and underpinned the Council's priorities especially relating to safer communities, regeneration, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

There was evidence of a commitment to improvement from all levels in the organisation.

The Council was subject to a Comprehensive Performance Assessment Report in 2004. In the three years since the service review the performance had improved and the Authority was now considered to be a good council with realistic and robust ambitions. The Inspectors reported that although not all residents currently felt the benefits of good services systems were now in place to enable further improvements to take place.

Fifty-eight per cent of key performance indicators showed an improvement from 2001/02 to 2002/03 and during this period 73 per cent of the key performance indicators, which reflected the council's own priorities improved. However although performance had improved national best value performance indicators (BVPIs) for 2002/03 showed that the Council performed below average compared to all councils in England. Compared nationally, 24 of these indicators (46 per cent) were in the worst quartile. User satisfaction information showed low overall satisfaction with council services in 2000/01 and particularly with housing, benefits and cleansing services. However, satisfaction with refuse collection, leisure and cultural services was high. More recent survey information from 2003 also shows high satisfaction with refuse and recycling services.

In 2002/03 the council achieved top quartile performance for the percentage of household waste recycled or composted. Recycling services consistently achieved high public satisfaction and were regarded by the public and staff as one of the council's most recognisable achievements.

Focussing on Environmental Issues the Inspectors found the local environment to be well maintained with public spaces clean and tidy. The council had introduced a range of measures to ensure that litter was cleared frequently namely the introduction of self managed and empowered area teams in 2001. The council took

a robust and proactive approach to enforcing litter, dog fouling and abandoned vehicles legislation, supported by education and publicity campaigns.

Public spaces were found to be generally free from litter accumulations and the council reported (2002/03) that 85 per cent of highways were of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness. However, the effectiveness of street cleansing was still not meeting users' expectations with the majority of residents dissatisfied in 2000, with the quality of this service. It is not unusual for Public perception to differ from actual performance assessment particularly in the environmental arena.

Council ambition also prevailed with targets including eighty per cent of the local population satisfied with the cleanliness of the environment by 2012 (52 per cent in 2000); increase recycling to 58 per cent by 2015 (government target 33 per cent);

The ambitions were also known to partners, elected members and staff but the public were then less aware of them.

Staff were committed to improving services for the public and the management team had focused their agenda on a number of the priority areas.

Staff morale was now considered to be good as opposed to low three years previously. Survey results indicated staff felt trusted and **empowered** to do their jobs, and to make decisions. They reported having good working relationships with their peers. Staff had become more customer focused and were committed to improvement. This suggests that empowerment was a strategy and part of the culture rather than an ad hoc arrangement.

Services generally had good management checking arrangements with lines of accountability and performance monitoring down to an individual level. Staff did know what was expected of them and their teams, and managers used a staff appraisal system to help set specific targets and measure performance. There was an increasing focus on assessing the impact the council was making on its corporate priorities.

The council sought to ensure that the local environment was overall well maintained. It had improved outcomes by combining grounds maintenance and litter removal services, with area based teams working to a performance based

specification. Litter picking of shrub beds and verges was now integrated with street cleansing with a greater focus on outcomes.

A further Comprehensive Performance Assessment carried out only one year later in 2005 showed that ongoing improvement was evident. The Inspectors reported that the Council had adapted its leadership style in response to feedback from partners and now managed flexibly, seeking consensus among partners and actively working to increase capacity in the community and voluntary sectors.

The structure of the Council's departments brought together into one department most of the units involved in service delivery, so as to provide an integrated service.

The Council was now judged to have **promising** prospects for improvement.

Its actions to improve people's quality of life were making a difference:

The Council's continued to state its ambition and it now had an overall aim in its three-year corporate plan is to be an 'excellent' council.

As well as achieving specific improvements in the performance indicators that it monitored, the Council was making underlying improvements to the structures and methods through which it operates to bring about change.

However, the Inspectors also stated that the Council appeared to be less active in exploring alternative ways of providing its services, either to improve the range and quality of provision or to increase its own capacity level. This could suggest that the Council was still process and target driven. The empowered teams were perhaps given only limited scope for change without reference.

The Council received its Annual Audit and Inspection Letter in March 2008 which stated that the Council had a clear and ambitious vision for the city. It was found to be moving forward in all of its corporate priority areas with good progress.

It was improving performance in national priorities with 61 per cent of national performance indicators improved which was above the average for district councils.

Recycling and composting rates had increased from 25 per cent to 29 per cent and the Council received the 'best initiative' award at the Let's Recycle awards and is now a Beacon council for recycling.

However the Council still had work to do if it was to become a top performer against all key performance indicators. Only 17 per cent of indicators are in the best quartile compared to the average for district councils of 33 per cent.

The Council was also found to be in the worst quartile for overall satisfaction. In the latest household survey only 46 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the way the Council runs things compared to 54 per cent in 2003. However, satisfaction with waste services had decreased. Satisfaction with household waste collection fell from 86 per cent in 2003 to 64 per cent in 2007; with doorstep recycling from 81 per cent to 61 per cent and with local recycling facilities from 80 per cent to 69 per cent. There is a common negative theme here when public perception of service quality is analysed.

The four area based self-directed work teams created in 2001 had been re-branded as the Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams and were found to be improving cleanliness especially in priority wards. The percentage of litter and fly posting was reducing and satisfaction with keeping land free of litter had risen (up from 50 per cent to 54 per cent).

The Council was assessed as Good in the latest Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

In summary from 2001 to 2008 the Council had shown sustained service delivery improvement in respect to environmental service provision. The Inspectors had identified examples of self-direction and empowerment being used as a management tool utilised by the council to deliver and sustain that improvement.

Authority D

The Street Scene service was inspected in May 2002. The inspection covered a range of street scene related services including;

- Highways maintenance – planned and reactive maintenance, street lighting, signs, signals, safety schemes and road safety education.
- Parking – parking management, operations and enforcement.
- Waste – domestic and trade waste collection and recycling.
- Street cleaning, including planned and reactive cleansing operations, education and enforcement.
- Grounds maintenance, including planned and reactive maintenance on open green spaces and verges.

The Inspectors assessed the Council as providing a **fair, one-star** service that had **uncertain prospects for improvement**.

The Inspectors considered the service to be **fair, one star** because:

- The Council was found to be under performing in waste minimisation and recycling. Recycling performance was weak and recycling targets had been missed, the waste stream continued to grow albeit at a slower rate over the past two years and waste minimisation was yet to be formulated into a published plan;
- The Council was not keeping streets and open land clean and free from litter.
- Comparative performance showed a mixed picture but improvement was slow and in recycling not improving at the same rate as other councils.

However:

- The Council had a clear vision and aspirations for the city's environment in its corporate priorities and key actions. Services had incorporated these aims into plans and performance management systems;
- Six new rapid response cleansing teams were operational;

The prospects for improvement were considered **uncertain** because:

- Progress in delivering planned improvements was patchy and slow.
- Approved and fully resourced improvement plans were not in place for some important areas like recycling, grounds maintenance and highways maintenance;
- The Council was not always willing to be open about its own performance and problems and not all stakeholders had bought in to changing the ways things were done. The Council had some way to go to remove inefficient working practices and release capacity to frontline service improvements.

However;

- The Council's strategies showed clear commitment to improve services that impacted on the street scene and local quality of life;
- Street scene had remained a clear and consistent priority for three years and the Council were aware of what mattered to local people;
- The Council was developing capacity in street cleaning services through changes to working methods, new staff, developing local facilitation and targeted investment;

The long-term vision and ambition as set out in the area's community strategy and shared with the Council in its corporate plan was specified as;

Making this a better place for all to live, learn, work and enjoy.

In December 2004, the Council improved on its 2002 comprehensive performance assessment rating of '**fair**' moving up to a rating of '**good**'. Within the assessment, a range of environmental services performance indicators scored **three out of a possible maximum of four**.

Whilst corporate and service aims and objectives were clearly set out and understood by managers, in talking to staff and supervisors the Inspectors found that these were not consistently known or understood. In some areas team objectives were understood but not how they fitted with other teams or elements of the service. The Inspectors felt this inconsistency in understanding could possibly lead to inefficiency with teams not contributing to each others success.

The Council was found not to be keeping streets and open land clean and free from litter. Whilst changes were being implemented they had yet to deliver significant changes to the cleanliness of the city. The Council was however in the process of introducing positive changes to its street cleaning service by aiming to provide a regime of cleaning that was appropriate to the area and its zoning as defined by the Environment Protection Act. These changes were implemented in January 2005.

When driving around the city the Inspectors saw heavily littered streets and open land. There was a noticeable difference suggesting differing standards and operations in place for cleanliness in areas that abutted each other, such as car parks and footpaths. This resulted in some footpaths being clean, but litter, dog fouling and detritus present adjacent to them. Public satisfaction with the cleanliness of streets was in the bottom 25 per cent for English councils, and had decreased between 2000/01 and 2003/04.

The Council was finding difficulty in convincing staff of the ability to deliver improvement through doing things in a different way. Despite having made a clear commitment in 2003 to removing the artificial barriers associated with operating under the old compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) regime, some staff were still reluctant to let go of the CCT culture and practices.

Despite a move to remove the artificial client/consultant/contractor split within the street scene services, the Council still had some way to go to remove inefficient working practices. The Council was still operating with internal trading accounts. This input based delivery model was not conducive to innovative working practices.

The Corporate Assessment Report of December 2005 found the Council to be **performing adequately**.

Performance information was seen to be being reported regularly to members and senior officers with some innovative approaches being used in some areas to manage performance. The approach across the Council however was not consistent.

There was a low level of customer satisfaction with services. The overall satisfaction with the Council fell from 59 per cent in the 2000/01 survey to 39 per cent in the 2003/04 survey but has risen 10 percentage points to 49 per cent in 2004/05. This was considered a positive result, albeit from a low baseline.

The Delivering Safer, Stronger and Greener Communities Service Inspection undertaken in 2008 saw the Council aiming to **empower** people and communities, by increasing participation in local decision making and influencing service delivery and to have cleaner, safer and greener public places. The Council was reporting on performance measures focusing on the cleanliness of streets and open spaces. Cleanliness of streets and open spaces had improved. This was verified by independent inspections commissioned by the Council.

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 found the Council to be **improving well**.

Performance had improved in most priority areas including environmental.

The Audit Commission's overall judgement was that the Council was improving well and had now been classified as **three stars** in its current level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Overall improvement in key service areas for the year 2006/07 had been good. The Inspectors found a good overall level of improvement in the Council's priority of achieving safer, stronger, cleaner and greener communities. Public satisfaction with the cleanliness of public spaces had improved.

Authority E

The Care and Maintenance of the City service was inspected in July 2003. The service includes: street cleaning, refuse collection and recycling; parks and grounds maintenance; toilets; engineering maintenance; car parking; cemeteries and crematorium; and depot and vehicle maintenance.

The Inspectors assessed the council as providing a **‘fair’, one-star** service that has **‘uncertain’ prospects for improvement**.

The judgements were based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

- The service had good links to the council’s overall priorities, and one of the council’s six core policies includes a safe, clean and pleasant city.
- Service delivery was good in several areas, including refuse collection, cemeteries and crematoria, highway maintenance and car parks.
- Comparative performance and residents’ satisfaction was good for refuse collection, although the amount of waste collected was high.

However, the service also displayed some less positive aspects, including:

- There were a large number of aims and ambitions that were not clearly focused or prioritised, and many of the targets were not specific or sufficiently measurable.
- There were few service standards, these were not being communicated to staff, and residents’ and customer information and feedback was also not well developed.
- Actions to raise awareness and to educate residents of the need to reduce littering were limited.
- Service delivery for parks and public toilets was considered poor, and residents’ satisfaction was also low for these service areas.
- The street cleaning service had low levels of residents’ satisfaction, and the service had many areas of weakness, although there had been some recent improvements.

- The council's performance declined in most of the national performance indicators for the service between 2000/01 and 2001/02.

The Inspectors considered that the prospects for improvement were uncertain. There were however some positive aspects which included the feeling that Councillors and staff were committed to the service and to bringing about improvements.

The council's *Best Value Performance Plan 2002/03* (BVPP) outlined its overall mission and ambition as:

'Improving the quality of life for all those involved with our city'.

The Plan also referred to one of the three key corporate aims as;

- 'To seek to achieve the highest standards of cleanliness in all areas of the City.

The Inspectors found the depot to be untidy and poorly laid out, with poor working and management practices that were affecting store operations, transport management, vehicle maintenance and staff morale. When the research interviews were undertaken here in February 2009, almost six years after this inspection the depot facilities had not been improved however a new building was under construction. Staff interviewed were looking forward to occupying this new building.

Interviews undertaken by the Inspectors revealed weaknesses with internal communications and some poor cross-department working and sharing of ideas.

The council recognised street cleaning as an area of weakness. In the residents' satisfaction survey undertaken in 2000/01, satisfaction with cleanliness was low at 54 per cent.

The council had successfully obtained Investors in People (IIP), and staff appraisals were being undertaken across many areas of the service. Some staff told the Inspectors that although they had appraisals, they were not always linked to performance.

The Inspectors concluded that service quality and delivery was variable. Some services performed well, such as highway maintenance, refuse collection, cemeteries and crematoria, and others less well, such as the street cleaning, parks and public toilet services. There were many areas with low levels of customer

satisfaction. High staff sickness was affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of all services.

The Comprehensive performance Inspection report of October 2004 judged the Council to be **fair**. It recognised that it had been over-ambitious in the past. As a result it was not found to be delivering high quality services or improving these over time. There was evidence of a shared commitment to serve the community and work constructively together, supported by clear protocols, roles and responsibilities.

The Inspectors felt the managing director; senior officers and councillors provided good leadership. Ambitions were being effectively communicated to staff. Staff were enthusiastic.

The council had still not addressed persistently high levels of sickness absence that were evident back in 2003.

There was a significant training budget and a strong track record of developing managers and trainees. Individual training needs were identified in staff appraisals.

The council was not however using performance data to identify success, or to highlight and share good practice.

Recent Audit Commission inspections rated the council's performance over a range of services as **'fair'**. The 2004 BFI assessment found a level of service that was **'fair towards good'**.

Achievement against clean and pleasant City environment indicators was disappointing. User satisfaction was poor – worst 25 per cent for parks and open spaces, cleanliness and planning in 2001. Performance indicators presented a very mixed picture, but overall the council was not consistently improving services in key areas.

The Inspectors judged the leadership and management style to be “*open and empowering*” Staff were encouraged to test out new ideas and learn from professional networks. A learning culture was in place to support improvement.

Learning was actively promoted across the organisation. Staff were well informed and had the opportunity to contribute to two way communication.

Despite this investment in training and a culture of Empowerment with the exception of satisfaction with waste collection services, the council was still not performing well in areas that were important to local people. Residents' satisfaction levels with the cleanliness of their local area were in the worst 25 per cent nationally, and indications were that this had deteriorated further since the 2003 inspection. This despite keeping the locality clean now being one of the council's strategic priorities.

The council had now however taken positive action to improve the user focus of cleanliness services by amalgamating them into a single directorate, supported by a series of service development plans. Recycling, waste collection, and elements of service that collectively contributed to 'street scene' were now grouped together

In the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of April 2008 the Council was found to be continuing to improve from a generally low performance base. In the last three years the annual rate of improvement was ahead of the average of other district councils although the Council's rate of improvement slowed in 2007.

The Council had continued to improve in its three main priority areas Streetcare services including waste recycling and street cleaning have improved.

The council recognised that whilst individual PIs were improving they were not improving at a rate sufficient to improve their quartile position, relative to other district councils.

In regard to Street care performance had continued to improve, although the Council's **comparative performance was still weak**.

There was evidence of an ongoing focus on street cleanliness in the City during 2006/07. These actions resulted in satisfaction levels with street cleanliness improving significantly from 57 per cent to 68 per cent, but this was insufficient to lift the Council's comparative performance out of the worst quartile.

The Council however at this time was considered to have well developed and robust plans for improvement. Following CPA in 2004 the Council set out to become a

'Good' Council by April 2008, and to become an 'Excellent' Council by 2010. This shows a continued ambition even though results to date would suggest this ambition was too ambitious.

Authority F

The Waste Management service was inspected in July 2002. The service review covered waste collection and disposal, street cleaning, commercial waste and recycling services.

The Inspectors assessed the Council as providing a **'good'**, two star service that had **promising** prospects for improvement.

The judgements were based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

The evidence suggested that the service was performing well in many respects:

- The waste collection and disposal service was efficient with low costs and satisfaction levels were above average.
- The streets were cleaned to a good standard which was reflected in above average satisfaction levels, but the cost of the service was higher than in many similar councils.
- The Council's waste management services were found to be accessible and responsive and fly tipping and abandoned vehicles were being removed speedily.

However,

- The Council's recycling rate was the worst of any unitary authority in England.

The Inspectors considered that the Council's Waste Management Service had **promising prospects for improvement** because:

- The Improvement Plan was comprehensive and identified areas of weakness and would deliver improvements that the public would notice.
- The Service had a track record of achieving significant change and there was commitment across the Council to the service and to the actions set out in the Improvement Plan.

The Council's ambition was to be a City that;

"should be a safe, attractive and sustainable city"

It was found that local people and traders were fairly satisfied with the general cleanliness of the streets and open areas. This was reflected in the performance indicator which recorded that 63 per cent of people were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service.

From the inspection, it was clear that there was a strong commitment from senior management, staff and members both to the need for, and value of the waste management service, and to its continuing improvement.

The Corporate Assessment of December 2002 concluded that the council itself remained largely traditional in culture, style and structure, characterised by continuity rather than change. The way in which the council operated did not support cross cutting and strategic priorities or help it deal with an increasingly complex and changing environment. The style of leadership was found to be centralist rather than corporate, with high profile managerial leadership, strong service departments and a large but comparatively weak corporate centre.

The style of leadership was found to be centralist rather than corporate, with high profile managerial leadership, strong service departments and a large but comparatively weak corporate centre.

In general terms, members and officers were clear about their respective roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and the boundaries between them, but lines of accountability and responsibility were blurred in some areas

There was however clear evidence of good and improving service delivery in some areas.

The council regarded the workforce as its greatest asset, and there was evidence of sustained investment in the creation of apprenticeship schemes in the Direct Labour Organisations. There was investment in training, but the quality and commitment to training and development was variable between departments. There had been systematic investment in training senior and second tier managers since 2000, though more effective investment in developing its middle management capacity to deliver the necessary cultural changes and service improvements is needed.

The culture of the council appeared to be shifting from its traditional, un-challenging and highly departmentalised culture towards a growing awareness of the need to change, but without a real strategic plan for how to achieve it.

The Council did not appear to have a strong record of identifying and addressing poor performance by its own services, which in some cases only became evident through inspection.

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of April 2008 found the Council to be improving adequately. It continued to make progress in its priority areas. Recycling and street cleaning had improved.

The Audit Commission's overall judgement was that the City Council was improving adequately, and the Inspectors had classified the Council as **two-star** in its current level of performance under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Street cleanliness had however improved significantly. The Council had expanded its recycling scheme, and increased its recycling rate, although its recycling performance remained below average. Resident satisfaction with street cleanliness and recycling had increased markedly.

Improvement was not consistent across all service areas. During 2007/2008 58 per cent of performance indicators (PIs) had improved. This was slightly below the average for similar councils. The corporate assessment of July 2007 rated the Council as performing adequately.

Overall satisfaction with the Council was however above average.

Authority G

In January 2002 the Environment Service function was inspected. The inspection covered several frontline statutory services. They had been brought together under the general title of Street Management and included;

- Grounds maintenance and street cleansing;
- Refuse collection – trade and domestic waste;
- Strategic engineering – highways; and
- Highways maintenance and management.

The Inspectors scored the Authority as a **no star** service with **poor prospects for Improvement**.

The Inspectors scored the Authority as a **no star** service because although they found a good refuse collection service and satisfactory grounds maintenance service, the roads (on which the majority of the budget is spent) were found to be in very poor condition and, although the Street care concept was considered to be good it had not at this time been fully developed with the Council's services still largely fragmented, and the public were not receiving a good service.

The Inspectors recognised that the refuse collection was a good service – the public were very satisfied with it, and it was being provided at a low cost. Street cleaning and grounds maintenance services were generally fair and were also provided at low cost.

The Inspectors felt that the Authority had critical weaknesses which were not being addressed;

- Services lacked strategic co-ordination and management which lead to poor planning and procurement decisions
- The implications of the Street care concept were not fully supported by Members and officers;
- Around these services, the Council had demonstrated a culture of feuding, much confusion and stress which meant there had not been the collective internal will to resolve problems;

- Area working was not integrated at service delivery or management levels across all functions,
- Improvement plans were largely process driven and internally focussed within individual silos.

‘Valuing our Environment’ was one of the Council’s five core values however overall, the Inspectors felt that the Authorities management of the long-term future of the environment was poor.

Street cleanliness was considered to be good. The town centre, in particular, was found to be clean and attractive on several visits by the Inspectors.

- Area based working in Street care was organised in areas but the operational activities were still largely being delivered as separate functions. There was evidence that standards varied between the geographic areas suggesting a lack of understanding in regard to agreed standards between work groups. The Inspectors found no evidence of empowerment or freedom to act with most operations bound by rigid contracts preventing innovation and flexibility. Although work had begun by the Grounds and Streets DSO to eliminate duplication, there remained some duplication between street cleaners and grounds maintenance and estates/parks etc. This poor co-ordination of resources resulted in different teams litter picking different parts of the same footpath or road.

The many conflicts found by the Inspectors at various levels of the service were causing much confusion, uncertainty and stress. Without resolving these conflicts the Inspectors felt the service to the public would not improve.

There was confusion between the different geographic areas of service delivery, and tensions between reactive and planned work. There were no single business processes across the whole organisation and different service and delivery standards existed throughout.

Even though the authority stated that area working was the way it wanted to deliver services in the future it was not integrated at service delivery or management levels across the service functions nor was there a coherent plan to overcome these difficulties.

The Comprehensive performance assessment Improvement report of 2003-2004 found the Council to be ambitious with a visible drive and hunger to improve shared by the majority of staff and councillors.

The council had begun to make progress in improving services from a low base but, as yet, there was still an absence of a consistent pattern of improvement in priority areas. There had been some visible improvements to the cleanliness and fabric of the area.

Staff morale was high and staff demonstrated a real understanding and enthusiastic commitment to the council and its priorities for improvement. They are consciously and actively involved in developing new approaches to service delivery and new initiatives. This was in complete contrast to the Inspectors findings back in 2002 where the inspectors found no evidence of empowerment or innovation. The council was now using cross-service project teams, such as the corporate performance management project team and project management skills to considerable effect.

The council's achievement of its targets on performance indicators was still however found to be inconsistent, with more than half the targets for 2002/3 being missed in waste services.

The inspection of environmental services in January 2002 identified an underdeveloped approach to street care. Since that inspection there had been substantial improvements in town centre cleanliness, including the introduction of the 'gold standard' for cleanliness within the town centre and a litter 'hit squad'.

The council was now using training to develop the knowledge and skills of managers within the organisation. Management activities such as **'the modern empowered manager'** and **'inspirational leadership'** had taken place for senior managers and capacity of middle managers was being systematically developed through a structured programme of assessment and coaching. A performance coaching pilot and mentoring scheme was also in place.

The council was considered self-aware and clear about what it needed to change in order to achieve its aim of being classified as **'excellent' by 2008**. There was a tangible drive to ensure that old behaviours and poor performance were rooted out. This strategic decision to introduce empowerment as the culture and to root out old

behaviours was being driven at all levels of management with a clear link to performance improvement and ambition. The Inspectors confirmed this by stating that the council was rigorous in challenging and seeking to persuade the minority of officers who did not yet recognise the need for change. They also commented on the openness to challenge permeating the whole organisation and contributing to the council-wide drive to improve. It marked a clear change of culture: openness was encouraged, there was a permission to admit when things were not working, and staff were being **encouraged to contribute to the development of solutions and freed to make changes**. Learning was visibly lead and encouraged by the political and managerial leadership who demonstrated genuine trust in the staff to identify solutions. This is the clearest statement yet of empowerment being embedded into the culture of the organisation. The council had held two conferences in 2003 on “**the modern empowered manager**” to develop a shared understanding of corporate values.

Performance of environmental services continued to improve, enabling the council to achieve **a score of 4 for environment block indicators for the second year running**.

The Environmental services team were inspected again in 2004 where they were judged to be **a ‘fair’ one star** service with **‘excellent’ prospects for improvement**. This was a dramatic turn around since 2002 where the same service was judged to be a **no star** service with **poor prospects for Improvement**.

The council had a long term vision of how the borough should look in 2008 and environmental services were considered to play an important role in achieving the vision. There were clear and challenging pledges for 2004 across environmental services which were linked to the council’s priorities. The council had adopted an ambitious target to deliver excellent services by 2008 and was clarifying the route to achieving this beyond 2004.

The council had made very good progress in improving environmental services since the services were first inspected in 2002. The Inspectors put this down to increased investment in services, improved management, a committed workforce, effective partnerships and closer working across the service.

The merging of the grounds maintenance and street cleansing services had improved levels of service and greater co-ordination. There was now more cross service working and as a result services were more responsive.

At the operational level, the Inspectors judged the improvement in environmental services since 2002 to be “rapid”.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment of 2005 found the Council had continued to improve since 2004. It was still considered to be an ambitious council: driving service improvements; improving the way it worked and using partnerships and alternative ways to deliver services.

There was found to be good capacity, including: strong corporate management, good staff morale with a “can do together” culture. The council had continued to have an intense focus on improving its services and establishing effective mechanisms to support this. There had been significant improvements in some priority services.

The Comprehensive performance assessment of 2008 concluded that the Council had continued to improve since 2004. It was considered to be an ambitious council.

The Council and partners had improved the environment for residents. In 2006/07 recycling and composting was above the average, and the amount of waste collected had reduced significantly.

Satisfaction with recycling and waste disposal was now amongst the best when compared nationally. Litter and detritus had been halved.

Improvements were being made to the physical environment. The attractiveness and safety of parks, play areas and public spaces had also improved.

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of April 2008 found the Council to have a good track record of improvement in its priority services. The number of performance indicators (PIs) shown as improving was significantly better than average. It had 70 per cent of indicators showing improvement since last year.

Authority H

In October 2004 the Waste Management service was inspected. The Inspection covered the council's Waste Management service, including refuse collection, recycling, street cleansing, environmental education and enforcement.

The Inspectors assessed the council as providing a '**good**', **two-star** service that had **promising prospects** for improvement.

The service was judged to be **good** because it had a number of strengths, including:

- Efficient and effective refuse collection and street care services that were accessible and responsive to users.
- High satisfaction with the refuse collection service;
- Overall improvements in the cleanliness of streets across the borough and within local areas to exceed the Government's target;
- A holistic approach to tackling local issues by joining up council services to increase impact;

However, some matters were seen as in need of attention, including:

- Side streets in some residential areas had quite a lot of litter with small build ups and the correct balance between proactive and reactive cleansing had not yet been achieved;
- The improvements in environmental cleanliness were not meeting users' perceptions and expectations;

The service had **promising prospects** for improvement. Positive developments included:

- An improved environment was a corporate priority for action;
- Councillors, managers and staff were committed to service improvements;
- The council had invested additional resources in the service, which was having an impact on the quality of service delivered;

- The council was aware of what further improvements were needed and was developing a more integrated approach to street scene management; and
- The service is well managed with a range of expertise.

The Council had ambition and vision:

'We will realise our vision of a borough of well educated people who enjoy good quality employment in a healthy environment;

Managers and staff were found to have a good awareness of corporate and service aims through the 'Golden Thread' performance framework, which linked individual targets to service improvement plans. Aims and service standards were communicated to users through the Community Litter Plan, a Cleanliness Charter, Corporate plan, area and local litter plans, and the council's website.

Refuse collection and street care services were considered to be efficient and effective taking into account the range and type of services provided.

The council was providing an efficient and effective refuse collection service. Recent data for best value performance indicators shows that 83 per cent of local people are satisfied with waste collection.

In 2003 the council merged street cleansing and grounds maintenance services so that responsibility for litter removal from shrub beds and grassed areas rested with one service.

Plans had been communicated internally and externally to relevant stakeholders, so that all parties were clear about what they were trying to achieve. Staff each had personal targets and accepted responsibility for how their performance affected the whole organisation.

Services needed to be further co-ordinated at a neighbourhood level to provide an integrated approach to street scene management. An area based management structure for the service was being developed to provide a focus on local issues with the capacity to co-manage mainstream resources.

Managers and staff were committed to continuous improvements and had demonstrated their willingness to embrace change. Managers and staff had also recognised the benefits of multi-disciplinary approaches to achieve greater impact in tackling environmental issues.

An appraisal system reviews staff skills in line with corporate and service aims and highlights training needs and opportunities.

Inter-departmental working relationships were good and were being enhanced through service improvement groups and a management forum to share learning and identify best practices. Staff appreciated the added value that is gained from working with other professional disciplines to tackle problems.

In December 2004 a Comprehensive performance assessment was carried out and in this the council described itself as being on a “journey towards excellence.” The council at that time however was assessed as being **weak**.

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 showed the Council maintaining its improved rating of two stars under the Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)'framework. The Council was improving adequately and making progress in improving services. Over half of performance indicators improved in 2006/07 but this was still below national averages and the Councils own recent performance.

Overall satisfaction with the Council rose by nine points but, at 40 per cent, remained low.

Authority J

The Street scene service was inspected in August 2001. The Inspection focussed on those service areas that were involved in, 'keeping the streets and open spaces clean and tidy'. The services included in the inspection were street cleansing, winter maintenance, gully maintenance, some aspects of grounds maintenance and the Council's 'Environmental Action Unit'.

The Inspectors assessed the street scene Service' as providing a **'fair'** one star service that will **probably improve**.

The Inspectors believed that the service elements included in the review provided a **'fair'** service overall, because:

- the streets were clean and the performance had significantly improved over the past year;
- the Environmental Action Unit was popular and successful; and
- Enforcement in relation to dog fouling had significantly improved.

A number of aspects of the service required attention and these were:

- public satisfaction with some areas was low;
- shrub beds and grassed areas have unacceptable amounts of litter;
- the fragmentation of the services had led to some duplication of work for example, multiple inspections of the same area; and
- Current contracts were of a mixture of input, frequency based specifications e.g. grass was being cut whether it needed it or not; and output specifications where work was carried out as necessary.

The Inspectors believed that the service will **probably improve** because:

- The best value improvement plan proposed radical changes in service delivery and was also consistent with corporate aims and objectives. It addressed the current fragmentation of services and key public concerns;

Part of the recommendations proposed by the Inspectors included a need to improve communications, motivation and all round commitment, by involving staff in

the improvement plans by inviting representatives onto the implementation team; and providing updates for all staff following every meeting of the implementation team.

The service was traditionally delivered on a borough wide basis but, in 2000, the Council created five teams. These teams maintained their own area to the required standards, cleaning locations as and when necessary. The Inspectors made specific reference in the inspection report that the teams *“had a degree of autonomy making day to day decisions at local level. In addition, four ‘hit teams’ removed fly tips and responded to customer complaints.”* This was a clear indication that the service considered empowerment as an aid to improvement.

This approach however was not found throughout the service with the Inspectors also reporting that there were still some internal departmental barriers to improvement. The Council had however acted on this with a commitment to removing these departmental barriers in order to deliver an integrated service.

A Corporate Assessment report in December 2002 described the Council as being a traditional council in transition. In the last two years it had begun to move from a traditional departmental structure and approach to direct service provision towards a more strategic community leadership role. The council had succeeded in delivering substantial service improvement in some major individual services, but there appeared to be no systematic approach to ensuring that this occurred across the council.

It had developed some imaginative approaches to service improvement, but these had remained locked in the original service departments and learning had not been systematically shared.

The management reorganisation was intended to promote a more effective strategic approach by delegating operational decisions to service heads and leaving Executive Directors free to manage more strategically. The new structure was also intended to improve cross-departmental working. A management development programme had been produced and some initial training had taken place.

The Inspectors singled out the environmental services team by reporting that Limited progress had been made on challenging existing patterns of service

provision through best value reviews, although some changing work patterns were beginning to emerge, for example in some environmental services.

A further Corporate Assessment Report carried out in December 2005 considered the Council to be ambitious with sound political and managerial leadership.

Overall the Council's performance was judged to be **adequate**.

Staff were found to be demonstrating commitment and detailed concern on the ground, showing innovation in delivering a wide range of service initiatives in often difficult contexts.

The Council had adopted a set of values, badged as 'single team principles', which referred among other things to a **can-do attitude**.

The tolerant attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council's values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff**.

The service was subject to a further inspection in 2007 and was now assessed as being a '**fair**', one-star service that has **promising prospects for improvement**. This was an improvement on the 2001 assessment where the service was judged to be '**fair**' one star service that would **probably improve**.

Comparative performance had improved overall. Cleanliness of relevant land had improved from the worst 25 per cent in 2003/04 to below the median in 2005/06. Unaudited data in 2006/07 showed that the quality was consistent with better than the median performance in 2005/06.

Leadership of the Service was considered effective. The Service was found to have active, visible and effective management, recognised by staff, partners and other stakeholders. The leadership from senior managers and councillors set the tone of the organisation by creating a climate of openness, transparency and mutual respect. Staff were being supported to perform to the best of their abilities.

The Inspectors again made reference to the introduction of multi-skilling for grounds maintenance and street services staff to provide a joined-up approach The tolerant

attitude to risk-taking and mistakes embodied in the Council's values had encouraged senior and middle managers to take significant decisions without upward referral, and **this empowerment has generated a positive response among staff.**

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of March 2008 reported the Council as improving adequately, and it was now rated as a **two-star Council** under CPA methodology. Although the Street Scene service was improving the Council as a whole showed a decline from last year's performance progress and rating.

Authority K

The Waste Management service was inspected in December 2002. The Inspection covered Waste Management including Refuse Collection (household and trade waste collections and recycling) and Street Cleansing.

The Inspectors assessed the Council as providing a **'good' two star** service that has **promising** prospects for improvement.

The Inspectors judged the Waste Management Service to be a **'good' two star** Service because:

- the borough's roads, streets and beaches were predominantly free of litter and refuse;
- refuse collection was a reliable and efficient service, provided to a high standard;
- overall satisfaction with refuse collection, street cleansing and recycling facilities was high;
- the Service was found to be responsive with efficient, helpful and polite staff

However, the Inspectors highlighted some outstanding issues around the working practices including the fact that front line staff across the Waste Management and Grounds Maintenance Services were not integrated to improve the overall quality of the street scene and there were some staff who were still working to a rigid contract based specification which negated the most effective use of resources.

The Council's ambition was to provide a;

'rural and urban environments that can be enjoyed by all people, now and for generations to come, and which contribute to their health, quality of life and economic prospects'.

Managers were considered to be committed and new appointments had strengthened the management structure. Front line staff had a positive attitude and recognised that there was a need for change to improve service efficiency and effectiveness with an emphasis on the service to customers. However, some supervisory staff still continued the practices of the previous contractor and kept to a

contract based specification for street cleansing, even though this was not in fact being monitored satisfactorily.

The Comprehensive performance assessment Inspection report of April 2004

found the council to have made significant strides from a low base over the last two years and was a **fair** council.

Current performance in a range of council services is generally satisfactory, but there were some areas where the council was not performing well. Performance against almost a quarter of national performance indicators was amongst the top 25 per cent in the country

Arrangements to establish and maintain staff focus included departmental briefing sessions as well as monthly managers meetings hosted by the general manager, and internal newsletters. There were some examples where this had led to more integrated service delivery, though with limited evidence yet that this had improved service quality.

Managers and staff were however finding the level and pace of change difficult to maintain.

Cleanliness of public spaces was generally of a high standard.

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter of 2008 found the Council's overall performance was below the average for all district councils in terms of a selected set of performance measures for 2006/07. The rate of improvement during the past three years was judged to be very low compared with other district councils.

In respect of the indicators that cover waste collection and recycling, the Council had continued to achieve overall improvement in this area but this had been below the average improvement achieved by other authorities in the last three years.

Appendix B - Semi-Structured Interviews

Settle them in.

Context and purpose.

Time frame for interview

Confidentiality

Ethics policy

What will happen at the end of the interview

1 - Biographical

- A Position in organisation.
- B How have you got to where you are now?
- C Experience 0 – 1 year's 1 –2 years etc
- D Relevant training & qualifications

2 - Empowered

- A What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post?
- B What do you see as the key standards of your organisation?
- C Do you believe the public feel they are getting a high standard of service?
- D What makes you say this?
- E Are you working for a high performing and ambitious Authority?
- F How are you currently managed?
- G Have you always been managed like this?
- H How is work allocated to you?
- J Is that effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?
- K Do you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?
- L Are suggestions welcomed and tried out?
- M Give me some examples.
- N How would you say the way you are managed affects the quality of your work?
- O How much of your work is prescribed and how much do you have influence over?
- P Have you ever come across the term empowerment?
- Q What does it mean to you?
- R From what you have said earlier do you feel empowered?
- S Do you feel that is the same throughout the Authority or unique to your team?

- T Would you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or have some say in how it is carried out?
- U Why do you feel like that?
- V Would you say your line manager empowers you?
- W What brings you to that conclusion?
- X Is this best for you and the performance of your team?

3 - Empowering

- A Who do you allocate work to?
(Could be no-one so interview may move to section 4 here)
- B How are your instructions passed down to your staff?
- C Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out?
- D What steps do you take to ensure your team are involved in decision making?
- E What freedom do you feel you give your team in changing the way work is carried out?
- F How do you feel this impacts on the quality of the service?
- G Would you say you empower your team?
- H What makes you say that?
- J What do you see as the purpose of management?
- K Give me some examples to support that.

4 - Summary

- A Is there anything you would change in the way you and your work is managed that you feel would improve performance?
- B Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that you feel would improve performance? (If Applicable)
- C What are the barriers to change then if you feel that way?

Thanks

Appendix C - Transcripts from the Ten Sample Authorities.

Each Authority has been coded A through to K. For each Authority Interviewee 3 reported to interviewee 2 and interviewee 2 reported to interviewee 1. Each Authority provided three interviewees with the exception of Authorities B and K who on the day were only in a position to provide two interviewees.

Authority A Transcripts

A1

What is your current position in the Council?

I am the operations manager responsible for refuse collection, recycling, street cleaning, market cleaning, & public conveniences.

Have you always worked here and how have you got to this position?

I joined here 5 years ago as the assistant contracts manager. Doing refuse and something new at the time recycling. Then we had a restructure here. Client and contractor merged and I got my current role.

Did you need any particular qualifications and experience to get your current post?

They were looking for degree level education and membership of the Chartered Institute of Waste Management.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post?

Emptying bins, sweeping streets, and always completing the day's duties.

What service standards is the organisation working to?

We have local performance indicators, Rafts of them unfortunately.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

A good service but as you will know the only people who tend to get in touch with us are those who have not had a good service. We have 100,000 properties, 100,000 inspectors.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitions Council?

Yes

How would you describe the way you are currently managed?

Open and honest.

Have you always been managed like that?

I have really yes in the waste industry.

How is work allocated to you?

We have our annual A & D's (appraisal and development) interviews. There is an element of workload in there. Regular meetings, Team meetings where we discuss who needs to be doing what. And there is also just the day to day stuff. Certainly on my side we do not have a meetings culture. People will just come in and sit down and say we have got this problem we need to do something about it. Very much a doing, an operational way.

Do you find that effective or would you like more say in the way thing get done?

No I have enough say. I have got superiors here who will always listen and they will give you the chance to put your ideas forward.

So do you feel you get ample opportunity to put your ideas forward?

Yes.

Are they generally welcomed and tried out?

Yes.

Any recent examples?

Long pause – we have a great deal of work going on at the moment with a waste disposal contract. I was feeling they were not placing enough emphasis on the operational aspects. It was being written by someone who did not, let's say, have the operational expertise. There was not enough say going in there. And I think now senior members accept the need for both points of view going in there. I think they then decided to involve us more operationally. The guys who are actually going to be dealing with it. That is one example that springs to mind.

Would you say the way you are managed could affect the quality of the work your team produces?

I think it is down to individuals. Some people respond in different ways. Some people you can talk about doing something and they will just go away and do it. And others you need to tell them how to do it. So there is no right

and wrong way and no one size fits all. I find I have to deal with people differently to get them to do things.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over?

Operationally I can change things but I would need to support that with a business case for doing so. So operationally yes. Strategically I think the stress is on the operational people who have a different outlook on life. And I think we have a Head of Service who needs to look at both sides of things.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it?

It's about getting people to take responsibility for things. Rather than saying I need you to do this they would take responsibility for it and want to do it.

From our earliest discussions would you say you are empowered?

Yes.

Would you say that is unique to your service or is that the style adopted throughout the Council?

It is unique to the management style of the people here yes. Some refuse crews you can empower to do things. Others you have to tell them exactly what to do. Its horses for courses.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or would you prefer to have some say in the way your work is carried out?

I like to have some say in it.

Why do you say that?

Because I believe that in order to be in a position to deliver the best service you have got to consider all the factors about that service. It is not just that one-person says we will do this. It should be well let's talk about why we should do this. It could be done better another way.

So would you say that your line manager empowers you?

Yes.

Do you think that is best for your teams and best for you?

It is certainly something that I respond to and the guys that report to me they respond to it as well. But there are also some people who don't respond to it.

Who do you allocate work to?

Primarily to assistant operations managers. As well as supervisors.

How do you physically allocate the work?

Basically the same format as my line manager. They will pop over or I will go over there to make sure everything is going okay and to check to see if there are any problems. It is done on an informal basis unless there are some formal issues in which case we will sit down and put a bit of time against it.

Do you feel it is your responsibility for deciding how the work should be carried out?

I think sometimes it is down to the individuals. If there is a problem that needs sorting out I won't tell them how they should do it. Unless they say I am not too sure what to do on this. But ultimately I will let them get on with it. We are open here at this Council. If someone says I don't know what you mean they will say that. And that is the way it has got to be. I don't want nodding dogs.

So what systems do you have in place so that your teams know they are involved in the decision making?

If they are involved in it then surely they must realise they are involved in it. What systems? Well if they are involved they know it I would have thought.

Do you feel you give your teams freedom in deciding how the work should be carried out?

Yes – we are not in a static industry here. It is not something that is the same year after year. It is constantly changing out there.

So would you say you empower your teams?

I think so.

What do you see as the purpose of management?

Efficient service delivery.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

No I don't think so.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage your teams that improve performance?

We are starting now to cascade down through the organisation.

Empowerment if you like. Making them more responsible. Historically things like missed bins we dealt with. We would just go and get them picked up. There was no back up to that to make sure they don't miss them again. Other than by Supervisors sitting on them. We are starting now to look at more use of management information. To sit down with the drivers and say that this is your last week's bins missed. It is too high, why was it too high. Then making them more accountable for their performance out there. That is something that is relatively new here because it is only a year or so since we have had a back office I.T. system. Prior to that it was on paper which was a bleeding nightmare. We have now got the system in place it is working.

Are there any barriers in this Council to changing the way things operate?

Yes mainly political as we have no overall control. If the three main parties gang up on each other which can happen. Then how we are meant to provide long-term business plans I don't know because as an example we put together a full round rescheduling which was meant to take place in summer, but we got the knock back politically. We are only short term planning because we don't know what those in power are going to ask us to do. I would like to do some long-term planning but I feel at the moment I can not do it.

A2

What is your current position within this organisation?

I am the recycling and refuse collection supervisor.

How did you come to get this particular post?

I was a collector driver and I went for the post of recycling supervisor. I had my hi-ab licence so I was half way there.

How long have you worked here?

I have been here 10 years. I was in the army before that.

Did you need any specific qualifications or experience to do your current job?

It needed just a good standard of education as well as an HGV licence, as essential criteria. Nothing too strenuous.

What would you describe at the key responsibilities of this post? What do you feel you are responsible for?

Making sure the lads are doing as they should be. Say within the health & safety remit. That is down as what we should be doing but there are other things to do within the man management side. That I need to learn about you know with all these different management styles we have got. I think you have got to be a little of everything in the environment that we work in. We deal with a lot of men not office workers. There are lads that have been out on the razz the night before, come back in, effing and blinding, and you have got to get a days work out of them. Not under the influence of course.

What National and local Standards are you working to?

How do you mean?

Any specific key standards that you are working to? Performance indicators?

None.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

In general yes. Yes – the last time I heard about the complaints against the work we do the complaints were very low.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

I would say high performing but ambitious – long pause – I couldn't say. I wouldn't say they were overly ambitious.

How would you describe the way you are managed by your line manager?

I have a good relationship with my manager so laisee fair I would say.

Has that always been the case with previous managers?

With the new managers that have come in we have grown with them. We were left to our own devices initially. We tend to run through common sense but there are a lot of practice and policies. I don't always think that is always a good thing but when you have been left to get on with it, left to your own devices for two years then you get a manager it becomes a little different. We have grown up throughout it.

How is work allocated to you?

The work is set out. We know what we are doing. Basically I could tell you what I will be doing this time next year and I could tell you roughly what I will be doing in three years time.

What systems are in place to make you feel that?

Because the rounds never change. However we are implementing a round change and that will be the biggest change for the last 15 to 20 years. We are treading our heels a little bit on that. When we first brought in wheelie bins about 15 to 20 years ago we only had 15 rounds but the City has grown so much we need to look at the rounds. It is task and finish but they are still not getting in until late. We have given all of our information on our rounds and everything we do to a company and they are going to work out how many rounds we need and how many trucks on each day. That should have been in already, however the powers that be are dragging their heels. Once that comes in it will be a bit of a mess.

Do you think the way the work is allocated could be improved or is it okay?

It's not very effective and again we have held back in re-organising it because we have got rounds coming in at half ten and rounds coming in at half three so the disparity is not very good.

Do you get the opportunity to put new ideas forward?

Yes.

Are your suggestions welcomed and tried out?

Generally he will leave the running of the department to the supervisors. If there is anything radical it is run by them to see how they are with it.

Any recent examples?

Small increase in the rounds put the trade waste on. We are looking at taking the paper and plastic from the hi-ab to bags using a normal refuse wagon. Less tips and more economical.

Would you say having the freedom to make decisions has an impact on the quality of the work?

Yes I don't think the job would be as beneficial if you did not have the freedom. You do need some parameters because it is open for people to take the piss but in general you do need a degree of freedom.

How much of the work you do would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over to change?

In my job or the job as a whole?

In your job?

I would say 90% is set and I have a say on say 10%. It's changing; we are getting more set in our ways. The boundaries are getting more and more solid.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it? What does it mean to you?

Someone said to me with responsibility being an adult isn't a matter of age. It's a matter of the responsibility you take on. I like to take on as much responsibility as I can get. So empowerment yes I do think that they will empower me as much as they can. But sometimes if you're the only one of a team that takes on responsibility then you become less effective then as it overloads you. And I feel that if I am to empower the lads and give them a little bit of responsibility it make them perform better.

Do you think that is unique to the waste team or does the whole of the Council expect its managers to operate in that way?

Actually listening to the Director of our Services I think he would like that to be rolled out over his department but I can't answer for any other departments.

So would you say you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or would you like some say in the way it is carried out?

Generally a little bit of both. There is going to be certain points where you get no choice in the matter. Depending on the kind of people you have in your department. If you leave it too much to them then it won't necessarily get done.

So would you say that your line manager empowers you?

Yes.

What brings you to that conclusion?

Because basically if there is anything he wants doing. Anything he wants to, say something off the cuff he will ask me to do it. If he wants something doing for a particular time he will ask me to come and do it.

Do you think that approach is best for you and team?

Sometime on some jobs there are better people here that should be doing it but I will be doing it anyway. But no I think it is better that I do it.

Who do you allocate work to?

I have a set of teams that I allocate work to who is my direct responsibility but in lieu of the other supervisors I will dictate to and issue work to their crews. In our job it is quite fluid. Complaints will come in and we will try to get the complaints dealt with as soon as we can. It's a case of on the radio ask them then tell them.

So what systems do you use to get the work instructions issued?

We would generally radio them up and give them a verbal instruction if it is a quick one. If it is something that does not need to be done tomorrow it will be a written instruction, but generally it is just verbal instructions.

Do you feel it is your responsibility to decide how their work should be carried out?

No not really. I am quite happy that obviously you have a policy to follow. If you were to ask one or two of the others you might get a different answer to that one.

What freedom do you feel you give your teams in changing the way the work is undertaken?

Not a lot. The job is basically set. Most of the drivers will work along a route and they will know if they are late or early knowing where they are on a particular street.

Would you say that you empower your teams?

Now from the management courses I have done I would say we have a directive style with the crews. More of a laise fair with some other teams that are left to their own devices. We normally ensure that we handpick carefully the drivers that will go onto those rounds. In general I would say it is more of a directive style. But again you would use whatever style is necessary at the time.

What do you see as the purpose of management?

To ensure that your health & safety is adhered to. To ensure that there are rules and regulations that they need to follow and left to their own devices they will tend to take shortcuts. That is when injuries tend to occur. Like I say it's passing of information and health & safety.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

I think it is about right. We have been working together for such a long time it may need someone fresh to come in with a new idea and say we could do it this way. You get blinkered after a while. We used to just promote to supervisors from within so we never get any new blood. It is sometimes better to get new ideas from outside.

Looking now at the way you manage. Is there anything you would change that would improve performance?

I came here from the army so I came with the approach if you give an instruction or get an instruction you follow it to the end. I have found out that is not quite how it works here but it has took a long time to get used to that. But as I have got older I have learned to be more relaxed to give instruction and follow that instruction through. Pride is also something that will come. If you give an instruction to one of the lads and he refuses the initial reaction is to dig your heels in and to follow it through. But sometimes it is better to

stop, listen to what he has to say as their argument might have merit. You can not just necessarily dig your heels in because you are higher up the food chain than he is.

Do you think the client/contractor split has gone now. Do the lads sign off and self manage the quality or do you check the quality?

As part of our job we have to go out and monitor. But because of the amount of paperwork we have to do you don't get out as much as you would like. It's my job to go out and monitor what they have already done, and where they have been and where they haven't been. They could be leaving the bins in the driveway with lids upside down, paper everywhere, and spillages everywhere. Just making sure that they are doing it correctly. Then we try and find them to make sure they are all wearing the correct PE, making sure they are behaving themselves.

What would you say is the biggest barrier to change in this Council if you wanted to change something?

Anything. If you want to change anything it is the process you go through. It is slow to change. As an example hearing defence is a mandatory thing. It has got to be. There is no choice in the matter. We are going through courses trying to talk them into it. Now this is where you start being directive by saying you have got to wear it. No choice and we are dragging our heels on it.

A3

What is your current position in the authority?

I am a collector driver.

What did you do before that?

I used to work for this Council on the parks. But they lost the contract and I moved over.

How many years experience have you in your current job?

About 20 years.

Did you need any specific qualifications or training or experience to get this job?

When I first came over from the parks I had a fortnight induction to show me the work.

What would you say are the responsibilities of your job?

To get the work completed. To look after the vehicle. Awareness of other peoples safety issues.

Do you know what standards you are meant to be working to or do you decide on the standards?

Well, they never actually set a sort of standard. They just expect you to work. It is task and finish so if some people want to run they run.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service? In relation to your service?

I suppose they get a fair standard really.

What makes you say that?

Well things are getting more complicated now. They keep bringing extra bins out and people get mixed up with which bins and which weeks to put them out.

Would you say you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

Sort of medium really. I suppose like everywhere else they are trying to get things right. It doesn't always work though because there are parts of the City with blue bins, black bins and brown bins now, they don't care what colour bins they are. They just use them all for whatever comes first.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

Well I would not say they are as good as the managers we have had in the past. Because we had a chap here once before who was acting supervisor. Not long after I came across to here. Now he used to be working at 5 O'clock and he was staying until late until the last lorry came in. Then even when he left he said things had changed. He said I knew what I was doing here in a morning. You know what Lorries are going where and where they will be and everything and now because they are slack they start at six and finish at two, and then there is our afternoon shift. They don't know what is going on now

compared to how it used to be. Because he even said and he was working longer then for the same money as this lot but he said I knew what I was doing.

How is your work allocated to you?

You don't know now till you get here on the morning. I used to be on one round all the time but now you seem to be here and there and everywhere and that's happened for the last couple of months.

Is that effective then or do you think there is a better way of doing it?

I suppose it still gets the jobs done but most of the people aren't happy with it.

Do you get the opportunity to get your views and ideas across?

Well there is a formal way. You have to put a grievance in.

But if you have an idea of a better way of doing something would you get the chance to tell them that?

Well you could try and tell them. Explain it but whether they will take to it or not is a different matter.

Is there a formal way to put ideas forward down the workforce?

Well occasionally they do send sheets round.

Have you ever come up with any ideas and put them forward?

Not really no. I mean you could try and tell them to put someone on a round that might know it better but whether or not they would try it.

Do you think they would take your advice?

Yes sometimes.

Do you think the way you are managed could affect your work?

Yes if you have got people happy doing what they are doing they don't mind coming in do they.

Do you think you have much influence over your work or are you just told to get on with it? Could you change the way you do things without telling somebody first?

Well sometimes you have to change the way you do a round. Sometime you can't always get in for say parked cars. So you just have to change it round a bit.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No not really.

It's a term where your manager would let you make some decisions without having to get his permission first. With that sort of definition would you say you are empowered?

No.

You referred to the need for being happy and motivated at work. Would you feel that way if you felt you were more listened to?

Yes probably. At the moment here they have got some firm in because over the last few years now we have had more work allocated to us as the City has got bigger. We used to have a set amount allocated for each day. But over the years the rounds have just got bigger with the more buildings. So this firm they have got in is supposed to see how much you can do in a day. It was supposed to be produced some time ago but it is not ready yet. We only get paid 7 ½ hours Monday to Thursday and 7 hours on a Friday. We start at 6 in the morning and no-one has a break. But whoever they have had in they have paid them a lot of money to do it to get it all properly sorted out.

So have they not involved the drivers and loaders in those discussions then?

No.

Well are they going to consult before it is implemented? Say for example these consultants say your crew can lift 1800 properties a day. Will be able to question this and negotiate?

No I don't think there will be any negotiating. They will say the allocation. Last year there was nearly a walk out because on top of our wages we got a bonus of about £100 a week. They served us with 3 months notice and just took it off us. So the unions issued 3 months notice to scrap task and finish so everyone worked the 7 ½ hours and what didn't get done just got left. They only did it for a week then they wanted task and finish back. They had to put 2 extra wagons on to reduce the work because some crews were having

to work until 4 or 5 0'clock. They had a meeting on the Monday and agreed we should go back on task and finish. But they lost £100 a week and they blamed job evaluation. There are a lot of our refuse collectors who are on family credit.

So looking at the way things operate here do you think your manager empowers you to make decisions?

No. They make the decisions. We just have to follow them.

Do you think that style of management is good for you and the team?

To be honest now the managers what are in here now. The ones that we had before all did this job so they understood it but now they are not. They have never done the job. We had a manager who used to go out on the back of the lorry to help you out.

Do you allocate work to anybody?

No just the crew.

If you and the other drivers had a good idea what do you think would be the biggest barriers to getting the changes made?

It would just depend if the managers were willing to accept it or not. At the moment the managers have all changed. We used to have managers you could go and talk to before. But the managers now want to say what goes now.

Authority B Transcripts

B1

How have you got to where you are now in the organisation?

I have been with the Council since I was 21 and started off in street cleaning. I then went onto a refuse round after four years. I spent five years in refuse collection and because I did what I was told and showed a bit of enthusiasm I applied for and got a Supervisors post and I have been in post for five years now. I started doing my HNC and built up my qualifications and experience.

What do you see as the main responsibilities of your post?

The main thing is taking on responsibility for ensuring that the performance levels are okay, the performance is managed okay, also that the workforce is managed okay. That they are all trained up and on a day to day basis that they are tooled up for work with their PPE on and basically doing what they should be doing. So performance and workforce and quite a bit of the client side looking after the customers and client requests making sure that work is done.

What standards of performance are you working to? Are there any specific performance indicators?

I do, the only PI I get involved in is on the street cleaning side. I look after a small street cleaning team of six men and obviously BVP 199 I look after so I am aware of what is expected that way. As far as the refuse side goes there is an official complaints procedure and I analyse and review those complaints once every six months do appraisals where I look at those complaints and discuss them with them.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

Before the twin bin came in we used to be the best performing refuse service in the District with 91% public satisfaction. And also the Council service we were the best service within the Council. Unfortunately since twin bin our public satisfaction has dropped which I suppose you would expect really.

Ignoring what the public think, what do you think? Do you think they are getting a high standard of service?

I think they are getting a good service, yes. I deal with the men and because I deal with all the complaints and all the requests and things like that, when we make changes, changes make work otherwise you can tell when you get quiet days that everything is happy and for me to be able to supervise 28 men if they were just going round slapdash I would not be able to cope with the work because we have got 20,000 spies out there.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious authority?

Yes, yes I do yes, High performing definitely. We have got the excellent CPA rating though our recycling figures have not been good so we are keen to be up there with the best which is why the twin bin was brought in.

How would you describe the style of your line manager?

The way he manages me?

Yes.

I think that he knows that he is lucky to have me. So I don't get too much criticism because he knows if I wasn't doing a good job then he would obviously be getting busier and busier but he knows that he doesn't have a lot to do so he knows there is a bit of respect there. We both know that he is lucky that I am here.

Is he an open manager? Is he happy to let you make decisions?

He is more than happy for me to make as many decisions as I need to. Things that I think I need to let him know about I let him know but basically I think he trusts my judgement.

Is this the way you prefer to be managed?

No it isn't actually. Previous to this there was a manager and three Supervisors wherever there was anything to be discussed, if anything needed to be decided we kind of held a team meeting and in those meetings I generally felt a bit more involved in things. Then with rounds needing changing and moving depots since then I have not been involved in the meetings. I have been left out. This is something I mentioned in my appraisal. I wanted the communication levels back as they were before.

How do you find out what your next day, next week, next month, next years tasks are?

Just informally I would say. Not structured although we do have a monthly team meeting where everyone gets involved. It generally involved all the admin staff and everyone. But there is no rigid structure for operations meetings or anything like that. It is just you know he works downstairs and he just comes up and tells me. But my work is, I would say I am at the limit of the work I can do generally. I don't really get involved in tasks. My tasks are five minute tasks. Hundreds of five minute tasks. Small minor tasks that someone has got to do.

Would you say that is effective or would you prefer to have a bigger say in the way things are done?

I would prefer that we went back to a three Supervisor system. As it is at the minute we have robbed Peter to pay Paul. This has left us a bit short and I don't think there is the quality being given to people that there was before. I used to have a lot more time to Supervise and get out there and make sure things got done. Now I generally get chained to my desk just dealing with responding to complaints and that is because a Supervisor has been taken out of the loop. So I have taken on the responsibility of three extra refuse rounds which creates its own on a daily basis and also of all the changes we are making.

Do you get the chance if you have a new idea to try it out?

Yes, I think so yes, they are very receptive.

So you think they would try them out if you had some suggestions?

Yes, I think so yes. We have a suggestions scheme where there are some financial rewards. This is open to all staff. But if it is new suggestions in your own field of work and I don't think they don't pay out. There are a few things we have come up with that they are fine about.

Any examples from your own field?

A minor one would be the colour of the bin lids. We have black lids and how green lids for the green waste. That suggestion was fed through and come back.

Would you say that the way you are managed could affect the qualities of your work?

We have got this structure in place that is wrong. And I e-mailed him and brought it up at appraisals and things like that. Anyway there is change ahead. We are changing the service. We are splitting the service from environmental service, which is street Long pause – I think the structure is wrong. I feel I should have a bit more control over things. I feel I am controlled by the amount of work. E-mails coming in 50 to 60 e-mails a day not doing any Supervising I am just dealing with the client side. The structure is wrong in my opinion and I have fed that back. When we first kicked off with the first phase of the green bin introduction and the work come in I went to my line manager and said it is madness that the busiest time we have ever had cleaning and refuse collection, recycling to a stand alone service and join street cleaning up with parks. When that comes in there will be a bit of work taken off me there.

A lot of the work you do is governed by statute however as a percentage in your daily work. What percentage can you decide how to do it and what percentage have you no control over?

I would say 95% of it I have got to deal with it because if I don't deal with it there is no hiding place. It will just come back and bite me. Previous to that when we were on a weekly bag collection complaints were minimal and basically I could be where I wanted to be just to look at things anytime and I could manage it that way. I think staff were aware that I could turn up at any location at any minute but now I am just chained to my desk doing everything on the phone which isn't good.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does that mean to you?

It means passing on responsibility to perhaps and trusting staff beneath you to take various tasks off you. We did actually, as part of the structure we took a lad out of the spare labour pool if you like, to give me some assistance for a few hours a week but the problem with that is as you are aware with the new changes and the new schemes we just couldn't spare him. My idea was to empower him to take on responsibility for supervising a couple of the bin

rounds or looking after the yard or things like that. But it did not materialise because every member of staff you could get your hands on has been out helping with the education role.

From what you said earlier do you feel that you are empowered by your line manager?

Yes I think yes definitely. My line manager is quite happy for you to take any work off him, which is good you know. It's not a bad thing is it when you feel your boss trusts you to do things.

Do you think that style of management is unique to your section or is it the corporate strategy in general to decide whether to empower people or not?

I think it is throughout the Council and the reason I think that is that they have invested a large sum of money in front line management training. We all went on the same training and the theme of that training was to open up the decision making to group meetings and let everyone feel they were part of the decision making process. Although you would make the final decision but they felt they could contribute to things. Basically managing with everyone feeling they were involved in the decision making process. So if everyone has taken away from that course the same as I did then whatever there is a decision to be made they would speak to the operators who generally more often than not the experts in that field.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out or do you prefer to have some say in the ways it is carried out.

No I much prefer to hear things from the outset and be involved in the planning and things like that. That used to happen more than it happens now unfortunately. Hopefully when we get the new structure I would get involved in things more from the outset.

Why do you think it benefits you to be able to work that way?

I just think that those eleven years experience I had on the tools have been invaluable to me really. And it is like when I deal with complaints the local knowledge and the experience I have gained I just feel that no one can get the upper hand on me or pull the wool over my eyes. I feel I can add that to this department as not everyone here has had that experience that I have had.

Obviously other people have other things, maybe more important things but if I can bring a bit of reality then I can see if things are do able or not do able.

You refer to two different line managers, would you say your current one empowers you more?

I think he lets me get on with things. Because we were colleagues as Supervisors I think he knows that 99% of the staff that comes in on a daily basis that I can deal with.

Has he been in any way explicit in letting you know that you have the freedom to make changes?

No we haven't really had that. I think that it has been a difficult position for him because he was temporary and there was always the likelihood that following the roll out of the twin bins, he may go back to his old role. He had kind of left me to it hopefully because he has got trust in what I can do.

Is that style of management better for you and better for the team? Or would you give a different answer to those questions?

Very long pause – I don't think it is best for anyone really. I think a manager who is more involved and more keeping an eye on making sure standards are being maintained and constantly mentioning things. I think that would be a better result for the service and for the team. Better for me possibly not but I would sooner have a manger that was more interested and more involved in day to day matters and what was going off and constantly reminding people of quality standards and things like that. I think that would be better for the service and for the teams and for everyone really.

Who do you personally allocate work to?

Obviously the refuse rounds have got their workloads sorted out. There are new builds coming in that need mopped up but we have had discussions about them. Street cleansing work again they have schedules so they know where they are going. There is small clean team, instant response thing and I deal with them on a daily basis. There is the spare labour pool that covers for holidays and I sort of instruct them on a daily basis.

How do you actually get your instructions to them?

First thing of a morning they come into the office and I have normally got the work prepared for them by the time they get in.

So is it written and verbal?

Yes there is a flare job sheet for them.

The work that they do. Do you think that it is your responsibility to decide how it should be carried out?

Long pause – To a certain point yes, I wouldn't say that I am the expert in anything. I will always listen to views and suggest things rather than insist on things.

How do you involve the teams in the decision making?

We do have regular street cleaning team meetings. Funnily enough I keep working hard on the meetings because the group said they weren't getting a lot from them, they didn't think there was any point in them so I made a note. I started minuting them and making sure I acted on them.

Is that because they thought they were perhaps just being talked at?

No I don't think it was just that, you know the street cleaning team are very good, they have won several awards for the environment. They are good and their work does not change from day to day or week to week. I was always keen to have some involvement in it myself and that is what they thought I was getting involved when perhaps I did not need to. I minuted all the meetings and tried to get some feed back jut to convince them it would be worthwhile really.

What freedom do you think you give them to change the way work is carried out then?

Long pause – deep thought – I don't think they get too much freedom to be honest with you. There is scheduled work that we have to carry out. Streets where we have to be twice a day so there is not a lot of scope for freedom. There are odd bits where they have juggled the road around between two sweepers; I have let them swap the road around to get the sweepers down. Yes so they have had some freedom to sort it out and let me know and I have changed it on the computer.

Do you think the facility of freedom for them is good for the service? Does it impact in a good way or a negative way?

It's a balance isn't it? A little bit of freedom is good but too much freedom you can soon end up not having the control. I feel as a manager or supervisor, you have got to feel that you have got some kind of control and that is not being a sort of control freak or trying to bully people you just feel if you are taking the flack from above so you need to know things are getting done the way you think they should be done or in a manner that is acceptable. Basically you are answerable.

Would you say then that you will empower your teams?

Long and thoughtful pause – quite possibly, not really – no, it is pretty rigid really you know.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

I think you have got to give direction. Direction from above and pass that direction through. Because talking to our director. Although he has got all the knowledge of systems and the other things he has to deal with, his knowledge of operational services is not that good so he directs the way to the operational service manager, so it is giving direction and passing it down, the direction in which we need to go. I also think as a manager we have got to – you have got to ensure – your staff are the most important commodity of anything – you have to ensure staff have some involvement in the way things are done. They have got to understand the bigger picture of the way we are going and if they can understand how things have to be done then there is no reason why they can't – I think with the staff we have here if you just let them know why the Council has to do this then if that is passed through to them then generally they are happy to accept most things really. As I said they are the experts in their field and if they don't think it can be done they will let you know about it. So it has got to be a two-way communication.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

Yes I would prefer to be involved in things from the start rather than just being directed.

Looking at your style. Is there anything you would change in the way you manage your people?

I think I have learned a lesson really. We had an incident a couple of years ago with an individual which is unresolved now and I wished I had been more aware of Council procedures and made sure everyone was aware of Council disciplinary procedures. That's one thing I would change.

Within the Waste Services teams if there was something specific you wanted to change, are there any barriers that would stop you making that change?

The only one thing I would say there is that when I was unhappy about something like the restructure I e-mailed to tell my line manager that I thought it was a wrong idea. I should also have copied in the director to tell him what was going off because my line manager set up this structure that was never going to work. But at that time I did not want to go against my manager. He was never going to back down and admit it would never work.

So was the whole team not involved then?

No. My line manager decided what he wanted and just put it in place and I just felt it was just robbing Peter to pay Paul. I was ready to throw myself off a bridge.

B2

How have you got to where you are now? What is your background?

I have been working for the Council for 24 years. I initially started off in grounds maintenance where I worked on a mowing gang. I progressed through that service to become a supervisor and then I was a stand in manager in that service for about eighteen months. I moved into Environmental Service about six and a half years ago where I took up the position of environmental services supervisor which covered refuse collection and street cleansing. I have been in my current position for just under two years.

Did you require any formal qualification or training for the job you do now?

I just worked my way through to it. Done the institute of Leisure management courses. A couple of those up to level 4 and various other IOSHH stuff, clean neighbourhoods master class, nothing formal in waste management as such.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post? The ones you would be held accountable for?

The operational activities of, at the minute we have got 50 odd staff. So it is the day to day issues around service delivery, service standards and you know obviously any failings in either delivery or standards in relation to the public who are our customers. I would be responsible for any mistakes around that.

You mentioned standards, what standards are you expected to meet?

We have got quite stringent standards in relation to government standards and performance indicators but we have our own service standards which we tie in to corporate aims. An example would be, we would say missed bins for example we would endeavour to collect within 24 hours, we have a range of service standards that we adhere to.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

Yes, yes I think all the evidence suggests that they are. Our contact with them and their response in various surveys suggests that our satisfaction rating has gone up. The majority are quite content – yes.

Do you think you are working for an ambitious and high performing authority?

Very – certainly in the last three or four years, having spent a lot of years in the authority you can see a definite change in emphasis in moving forward.

What do you think has created that?

We had quite a strong chief executive that was helpful. I think a while back we trimmed a tier of management sort of mid to senior management which helped.

How would you describe the style of management of your line manager to you?

He does empower people. He does like to have confidence in the people who he is working with and for. He is not a shouter; he's not that kind of guy. He knows his staff but he's more a case of if he has got confidence in you he will support you if you have got issues.

Has that always been your experience with other managers?

I have had experience of the old type manager who would shout and ball. I have had experience of those that are a bit too laid back, you know, gives you too much reign. I think the balance is about right.

How is your work allocated to you? How do you know what you will be doing next week, next month, and next year?

Obviously, we have annual appraisals and we have monthly meetings as a service as a whole including supervisors. In between times any issue on site or any ongoing problems just talk about it.

Is that effective do you think or would you rather have more say in the way things get done?

Because of his style in relation to your core work he does let you get on with it. He is there as a support mechanism in some respect where if you are having a blockage with other sections or a certain tier of management which you need to clear, so that you can get the target achieved, he will step in and help.

So, do you believe you get the opportunity to put new ideas forward?

Very much so – yes – very much so.

Are suggestions welcomed and tried out?

Yes.

Can you give me any recent examples?

Yes, we had to find a way in which we could collect bulky waste items because of the twin bin scheme and I suggested that we could tie it in with what's called a mop up round which collects any missed bins during the week. So we tried to tie the two in because you can mix the waste you see. If it is black bin waste it is okay to go on with a settee or whatever else we are collecting.

How would you say the way you are managed affects the quality of your work?

I think that the in which we are managed in general it allows for this open dialogue. You know you are not going to get in the situation where you are making a pigs ear of anything because it is going to be observed. It is going

to be picked up outside. Having that two way mechanism lends itself to making sure the job is done.

I know a lot of your work is prescribed by statute. How much of your work, as a percentage, do you have control over?

Well, with central government targets and internal targets the vast majority of the work; you must be talking in the region 75 to 80% day to day work is tied to one PI or another. That in itself can sometimes be frustrating.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does that mean to you?

Well to me I look at it in the way of an individual being given, you know, being instilled with some confidence and flexibility about how they carry out these activities and give them the opportunity to make suggestions and change things because to me they are probably the experts.

From what you have said earlier do you think you are empowered by your line manager?

Yes – yes I do, yes I do.

Do you think in this Council that is a strategic perspective or just in the Waste teams?

Yes I think that is in general the way the authority wants you to go. I don't think that some of the other sections are quite as far down that line as waste is because it is an ever changing industry sort of thing. I think it is a corporate aim but we are further along the line than others.

So, would you say you prefer to have your work spelled out or would you rather have some say in the way it is carried out?

I would rather have some say; I would rather have some say. There are certain things that have to be programmed but I would prefer to have some impact.

How does that make you feel? Why is that?

Because ultimately you want some kind of job satisfaction and I think by having the feeling that you are involved in decision making you feel that way.

So would you say that is best for you and the organisation or would your answer be different to both of those?

I think ultimately it's better for the organisation. If you have got people who are satisfied and content you will get a bit more production and may be a bit more motivated I would have thought.

Who do you actually allocate work to?

I have got two supervisors who cover the split of 50/50 street cleansing and refuse. Then I have got line management through them to 53 front line operatives. I have also got the office based administration staff.

How do they know what they are doing next week, next month, and next year? How do you allocate work to them?

It is similar. We have annual appraisals where we set targets, regular team briefings and additional to that the two supervisors deal with people on a day to day basis and I get involved as well. I go down and talk and meet with them. Almost on a day to day basis. I base myself downstairs in the reception area where all the guys come in to pick up sheets and to fill things in. So I am in constant dialogue with them.

Do you think it is your responsibility to decide how the work is carried out? but?

Again I think it is a case of having confidence in the people who are doing that area of work. I have got two supervisors. I don't feel it is necessary to tread on their toes unless they ask or unless there is a particular issue.

So do you take any formal steps to ensure that they feel they are involved in the decision making?

Yes, yes I think what we do we are all in the same team briefing if you like. We have pretty clear directions as to who is doing what, who's got what role, who will take the lead of a particular task that needs doing. It could be anything, we have got confidence in somebody to take a role on and say right well you run with that and see how it pans out.

Do you think they know they have got that freedom?

I think so.

Have they formally been told then or is it in the way they act?

I think they have formally been told it is part of their initial job description that remit to have that authority.

Does that freedom, do you think, affect the service? Does it make it a better or a worse service if you give them the freedom?

I think that is down to individuals and their skills. If you have individuals who are making decisions who may not be up to the standard that is required, then that is dangerous. It could be dangerous but I think that then falls on their line manager to ensure that they are up to standard. It has got to flow through from bottom to top and vice versa.

Going back to this team empowerment then, do you think that you empower your teams?

Yes I do, yes I do.

What makes you say that?

Well because I am a great believer in that if you have the right people in the right roles with the necessary skills to carry out their activities. I would have thought you won't need to involve yourself too much. That's my style if you like.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

Well, if you are talking about front line service I think it is to oil the wheels. It is to keep things flowing both ways. You have got to provide the front line people with the tools to do the job well. The physical resources and the machinery, and I think you have got to have this understanding that you are working with them, alongside them and you are not working against them. It is all in the same direction.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed by your line manager that you feel would improve the performance on the street?

I don't think so because again if you are instilling confidence in somebody and giving them the necessary support when they need it, I personally think it is the way to go.

And the way you manage, do you feel you could change the way you manage to improve the performance?

I think you are always learning stuff. I think the most important thing is dialogue. Make sure you are speaking to the people.

Looking back at those last two specific questions if there were any barriers in the way to change do you think this authority would allow you to make the changes?

I think they would. I think they would. I think it is one thing that the authority is good at. They are good at trying to get rid of blockages if it is affecting service delivery or if it is affecting individuals.

Authority C Transcripts

C1

Can I just collect some biographical information? What is your background?

I actually started with the City Council 10 years ago as a Waste Management Trainee. Basically I worked my way up through the structure. I was trained in all aspects of waste management. I have just seen the department grow and grow and have moved on through. That has been my first key job since University so there has been nothing of any use before.

How many years have you been in this particular post?

This post, one year.

What training and qualifications have you needed for this post?

It was all on the job really. I did not have to have any specific qualifications for this job. I suppose one requirement was I had to have or I have been put through the COTC for the transfer station that we have here and I was put through a management degree.

What do you see as the main key responsibilities of your post?

To ensure that, well basically one of the key goals of the Council as a whole, one of the key targets that we've got is to make the authority cleaner and greener, simple as that, and I fit in there by making sure that there is efficient use of the resources that we have to enable that. I am sure it sits slightly below the strategic level and I am Head of service. I look at operational systems and how we use those and basically making sure that people are playing their part.

What do you see as the key standards or performance indicators of the organisation?

Well, mainly we are using BV199 at the moment, obviously, everyone is using that and focussing on the figures they get from that. I can't think it necessarily gives you anything useful but everyone is using it. Satisfaction surveys as well whichever one that one is. BV82 I can't remember the number. A three yearly one on that. We don't do specific in house surveys as such out to the public, what we do do is run litter education campaigns within

that we do a lot of monitoring on the ground to give us some basic figures as well. Something to work on.

Do you believe the public are getting a high standard of service?

From street cleansing it is always difficult because err, I think they do, I can't remember what our figure was, 54%, err it's not great but, I think it was 52% last time. It has only gone up 2% percent but I think as you improve I think people get more aware of the situation your not likely to improve as the better the place is looking the more likely they are to complain. So 50/50 as our scores proved.

Do you think you are working for a high performance and an ambitious authority?
Yes.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

(laughter) How would I describe that?

The style would you say?

I think I have got a fairly free hand to do as I wish within the authorities boundaries, hum I think we are fairly free to come up with our own ideas. Non prescriptive.

How is work allocated to you at the moment?

Very informally (long pause). There is now more of a structure, since we, previously there wasn't any structure, and quite literally I could end up with a waste management job or a street cleansing job. It is a more defined structure where I know I get involved in street cleansing issues.

Is that new or in your other posts have you always been managed like that?

It's been exactly the same, to be honest; I have had the same manager since I started, so there has been very little change. The Directors have changed so their direction has changed. But not directly, no.

So this freedom you are given would you say that is effective or would you like a bit more say in the way things are done?

I would say that there are a lot of prescriptive procedures that the authority as a whole has, as with any authority. I think it does help and it does work as it allows you to use your imagination to come up with ways, obviously they will always come and say you need to achieve this, not really, he doesn't really put a definite on how you are going to do it. Although he is quite useful as he has a lot of ideas anyway himself.

Do you get the opportunity to put your ideas forward?

Yes, yeah.

So would you say your suggestions are welcomed and tried out?

If they are any good yes.

Can you give me any examples or one example?

A particular idea? Hmm restructure of operational staff. Since our restructure last year, tried out various different things.

Would you say, in your view, the way you are managed affect the quality of the work or has no impact at all?

It's difficult to say because it has always been the same. It probably doesn't have a massive effect on the work. I think it is effective (pause) some people work better in that situation than others.

How much of the work you do would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over? Percentage wise?

What is prescribed, probably 5% or so that is actually prescribed functions, the rest of it I can influence.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Empowerment – Yeah.

What does it mean to you?

From my own personal view I am empowered to influence the way things operate within the, not the authority, but within the section.

From what you said earlier, to the earlier questions, do you feel empowered?

Yeah

Do you think that is unique where you work or is it the authority's strategic policy?

Ohh blimey, it's a bit hit and miss that one. It's definitely within this department. I think that's correct. Hum couldn't comment for elsewhere really, err possibly.

Would you prefer to have your worked spelled out?

No (instant response)

Why do you feel like that?

I think it is easier to have an influence then because you know, we have learned from experience what needs doing and what is important. It is just easier to manage your own workload. It's taking that responsibility as well. Making sure you are responsible for what is going on.

Would you say your line manager empowers you then from what you have said?

Hm yeah.

What brings you to that conclusion?

(Long pause) I think he's probably, it's not necessarily a good thing, but there is that much going on in local authorities and the work we are doing at the minute, that he has to. And I think he basically has to then, you know, just leave things to us, and empower us to make those decisions and allow us to take things forward because he does not have the time either and we have probably got to do the same with the staff below us because there is jut not enough time to do everything.

Do you think that is best for you as an individual?

It depends on the particular occasion. I think yes most of the time it is. on the odd occasion you know that you need support and you need somebody else's direction from above because it does involve a higher level of decision making which may not be present at the time.

Would you say that is best for the performance of the team as well as yourself?

Yeah (long pause).

Who do you allocate work to?

The key supervisors plus the education officer, and the enforcement officer,

And how do you pass your instructions down to those staff?

Generally verbally. But with e-mails flying everywhere a lot of it is electronic these days.

Do you feel it is your responsibility for deciding how their work should be carried out?

No, there is a lot certainly within this section; there is a lot of freedom to be able to do whatever you want.

What formal steps do you take to ensure that the team is involved in decision making?

We have operational meetings, generally about once a month. We try and sit down and make sure everybody is doing, knows where they are going, so that they are involved in the decisions for the whole of the department. My boss isn't involved in those.

What freedom then do you feel you give your team in changing the way the work is carried out?

There is quite a lot of freedom to do that. Although if it does influence procedures and practices that have been done for some time they do have to check to ensure that it doesn't affect everything else. They do tend to feed back through me. They are quite responsible in that way. I am quite lucky that I have got decent staff.

Do you feel that has a positive impact on the quality of the service?

I think so because it makes them feel that they have got responsibility for it rather than they are just following a procedure that someone else has come up with.

So going back to this empowerment position would you say that you empower your team?

Yes (instant response).

What makes you say that?

I think it just comes from general experience of what they have done. As an example the previous, she has just left, the litter education officer was generally empowered to do as she pleased so long as she followed our general theme and she won numerous awards for the work that she did. She was put in for local government worker of the year etc.

What do you see as the prime purpose of management?

To do the jobs that nobody else wants to do. To make the ultimate decisions, to make the more difficult decisions I suppose.

Do you have any examples to support that?

Okay – operational staffing. To make the final decision on whether somebody is sacked. (long pause).

Is there anything you would change in the way you and your work is managed that you feel would improve performance?

(Very long pause for thought) I suppose it would always be nice for, and this is for high dreams it's not going to happen, it would always be nice for your manager to have more time to spend looking at the direction you are going in. To enable you to make sure you, you know, that things are getting complete and checking over of, making sure we are going down the strategic route, but the way modern life works it is very difficult. But no, other than that.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage, that you feel would improve performance?

I think I am the same I wish I could spend more time with the staff. I have got to make them feel like they were involved more and make sure they felt comfortable with what they were doing.

If you feel that way with both aspects what do you see as the barriers to changing that then?

It's just financial pressures, all authorities have to try to make savings, and there is just not enough staff to achieve what you are trying to do. I expect that comes from everybody?

C2

Could you just give me your background up to where you are now?

I started off as a refuse collector way back in 79 then I went driving a refuse truck.

So you moved through the ranks?

Yes.

The current job you are doing how long have you done that?

Four years.

Did you need any training or qualifications to do the job?

Well I've picked it up as I've been here but I have been on various courses and training such as computer awareness and things like that, health & safety courses the usual stuff.

What do you see as the main responsibilities of your job?

My job really is to deploy the staff in the different areas to the jobs that need doing on the day. Then I monitor it

How do you know if you are doing a good job? What are the standards?

We do have standards, we set standards that streets have to be so clean and then it is a case of monitoring them to make sure they get done through the day, and report any problems or things like that you know.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

For the street cleansing I think they are getting the best we can provide on the budgets that we've got. Obviously we could use more staff and more machinery but budgets only allow certain amounts don't they? We are doing the best with what we've got really.

Do you get any feedback from the public to say "I think it's good?"

The way I monitor it is we have a system what we call Mayrise ticket reporting where people can complain. Dealing with those, the way I look at it is the less of those we get then to me we are doing the job. We don't get quite as many as we used to. We used to get quite a lot of complaints but they have gone down a hell of a lot.

Do you think in the view of the managers of this Council that you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

Oh definitely (long pause followed).

Your line manager, how would you describe the way he manages you?

Well to be honest ha has been here for a while now and the position he is in now is pretty recent so I think he is on a learning curve you know. I have been at this for four years and you need to be actually doing the job for at least two years, before you get to iron out all of the problems and things like that.

How do you describe the way he manages you? Does he say go do this, go do that or does he let you make decisions?

He lets us make quite a few decisions but he does give us lots of things. He seems to get complaints and passes them on to us to deal with. It's a new post so I don't really know. It's pretty recent. It's not that long.

Would you say he is a different type of a manager you have had?

Yeah, personally I think he is a bit weak, you know. There are things I'd like to get done and I want done as soon as or there and then but you just can't get that way with my line manager because he sticks to the book, the rules, you know he can only do certain things and certain ways of doing them.

How does he allocate work to you then?

Well he's taken over and we already had the system set and we are still carrying on with that system. He is looking at changing things you know setting up his own systems, sort of thing.

If he wants you to do something how does he just tell you, does he send you an e-mail?

E-mails, radios, mobiles.

Is that effective? Does it work okay?

It's working fine yeah.

Does he give you the chance to put ideas forward, say if you think of a new way of doing something?

Yeah we have monthly meetings he has set up and see how things are going and see where we can take them. Once a month, Huh, we have only had about three. There is always something else crops up you see.

So would you say he welcomes suggestions?

Yeah definitely yeah.

Can you think of anything you have thought of where he has let you introduce it?

What do you mean my way rather than his?

Yes.

Not really, no. He's not been at it that long. At the moment he has only just got promotion like last year. He has been doing the work prior to that but he has got the position now. You see what I mean?

The way you are managed, do you think that affects the work? If you are given freedom or if you are told exactly what to do, do you think that could have an effect on the quality of the work?

What it was, when I came into this post they had a system that was set and it wasn't working at all. It was like a fortnightly clean of areas. You know what I mean. So they wasn't using the resources to the best, in my opinion, so what we did, we sat down and looked at it overall and we designed a system that we use at the moment so that everyone except the cleaner areas of the City gets a weekly clean at least. Areas that need more now get two times maybe three times litter picked you know. It was a long process and we divided it up into mapped areas. It goes on and on. It took us a long time to sort out. So that's the system that we set then but now he might want to change that, I don't really know yet. He's looking at changing certain things, certain ways you know, but I don't know without speaking to him what he wants to do. It is working better a lot better than it was when I, It wasn't just me it was a team of us that did it, four supervisors you know. To my opinion, it's come out a lot better than it was.

In your days work, how much of it do you think you can change or you can't change, say it's got to be done that way?

Well we don't have the resources to be honest with you to change the way it's done. I say if we had resources to get us an extra sweeper, we could do this area more than we are doing at the moment because it needs it then fine, but it doesn't happen. You can only manage what you've got and do what you can with what you have got but that's the problem.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No (followed by long pause).

It's a term proposing that you are given freedom to some extent to do things the way you want to do them.

Yeah – I think we've got quite a bit of that to be honest with you. If we do want to change something obviously we will run it past him and then he says yay or nay. (Yes or No).

Using the definition I used would you say that he empowers you to some extent?

I think as it is at the moment, he has pretty much left it as we were running it. The main difference since he took over is he has set up what called neat team areas where we have got extra funding. I think from government. These crews are in certain run down areas and that is what they concentrate on that one area and that is working really well. That has helped us a lot you know but I mean funding for that may run out next year but it is a good system and it does help us quite a lot.

That style of giving people freedom do you think that happens right throughout this Council or just here?

I don't really know about the others. (Long pause). It might be that we won't have that. Like I say he's just learning like I did. He might have something better.

From your own personal perspective would you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or would you like to have some say in it yourself?

Well, to be honest with you, I don't want to blow my own trumpet but I've been here 28 years so I know all the ins and outs of things, so I know the job but

my line manager may have more improved ideas. By all means I will listen to them and try them out. That's the way I work.

So why does it make you feel like that? Does it make you feel better in the job?

Well it would make you feel better yes.

Looking at you as a manager now, who do you allocate work to?

All street cleansing staff that we employ here. My line manager has an idea here. This is one of the things he is looking at. He is going to divide it up. There are three supervisors in my position. His latest idea is that what we do is split the whole City into three sections. We haven't done that yet. This is an ongoing process and we will see how it works that way. But to me, we want to try it but to me I think it works better as it is because you'll have a section, say my section, and I will be responsible for everything within that section. That's fine but am I just responsible for that section or do I help out with the other two sections.

At the moment we work across the board you see for everything as much as we can obviously but that's what we try to work together at the moment. But do we know the way my line manager wants to do it, he wants to split it. We are gonna try it but we don't know.

Did you get the chance to input into that?

Yes, this is what I say we were supposed to have a meeting. It's only just something that he is going to start looking at. We were supposed to have a meeting yesterday but it got cancelled. One of the supervisors is on leave so we are waiting for him to come back.

If you and the other two supervisors are singing the same song do you think your line manager will listen and back down?

I don't think so, no. It's an idea he wants to run with I think we will be trying it. It might work better but I would rather be able to help the other two and as it is at the moment we are all responsible for all of it. If there is a problem one of us may have a better idea and we can sort it out. If you've got your own patch it is probably easier for yourself but I want to be involved as much as possible and help out where I can. I muck in that's the way I like to do it.

How do you pass instructions down to your staff? How do they know what they are doing tomorrow?

We organise them, we give them what is called a section map for each day. They have an area to complete in that day. We give these out every day with the log books and things. Then obviously we have contact through radios, and any obstructions or access problems we might have, they will contact us, we will go out, see if we can sort it out there and then or just log it on the sheet and go back to it the day after and look at it then.

Do you think, looking at the work they do, who is responsible? Is it up to them to see it is done right or is it up to you?

Well they know we are going to be checking so they have to do it. If we are not happy then we send them back. If we find an area that is not up to what we want doing then obviously we will instruct them to go back and do it again. We check it you see through the day.

So is it more their responsibility than yours to make sure it is done right?

It's our responsibility to make sure it is done but it is their responsibility to do it. They have been given the instruction to do it and they know what standards we expect of them so we ask them it's not been done and send them back.

You mentioned the monthly meetings your line manager has set up with you. Do you have a similar thing set up for your staff to make sure they feel they are involved in the decisions?

We don't do that actually no. We don't have meetings with the staff.

So are they involved in the decision making it all?

Well they come with ideas, you know what I mean. You know we are not always right. If we say such a thing and they say no we can't do that for whatever then obviously we take that in and look at it and make it better. We do work together that way. On a one to one you will get more out of someone than if there is a few.

Do you think you give them any freedom in the way the work is done or not?

They will say to us “I think it’s better if we do such a street at such a time or in the afternoon or morning”. We will listen to that and say try it. It’s nothing set in concrete. If there is a better way then we are always willing to try it.

So looking at this empowerment, we discussed before, do you think you empower your team? Do you think you give them responsibility?

Personally, I think I do yeah. I like a lot of feedback. As I say I don’t have all the best ideas. Their ideas could be a lot better than mine so I am always willing to listen and change things.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

The main purpose is you’ve got to get a job done to the best of your ability really. Without a management structure nobody is going to do anything are they? If they are not going to be checked they will just do what they want.

Do you have any examples of that, the way you manage your people?

Not really, no.

Looking at the way you are managed you, is there anything you would change that would make it better out there, what would it be?

(Long pause for thought). I don’t know. There are a lot of things really. It all comes down to funding and having the people to do what you want them to do. You’re limited. You could do with more supervision on refuse you could do with a load of things but again, it is down to budget. You just haven’t got enough resources. You’re doing the best with what you’ve got. To me that’s not good enough you could do better.

Looking at your line manager specifically and the way you interact with him, would you change anything or not?

I think really to be honest we should have more meetings and more discussions and look at all different ways. It’s like I said someone’s always got a better idea than yours so it could be better. So you should definitely have more meetings. But everyone is too busy. You are trying to do more than one job.

Looking at the way you work with your staff is there anything you would change that would make the performance better? Would you change the way you manage them or is it fine the way it is?

For what you expect them to do it is pretty alright as it is. You can only get so much out of someone in 7 ½ hours. It's a push everything is a push because of lack of resources. You've got to do the best you can.

What barriers are there then stopping you doing that?

I know I am going to keep repeating myself but resources.

So it is not the way you manage or are managed?

No given more you can do a lot more. That's my personal opinion anyway.

C3

How have you got to where you are now? What is your work background?

Before this job I worked in the private sector I was made redundant in 2002. I applied for the job here and here I still am.

So how many years have you been in this particular job?

About 4 ½ years.

Did you need any training or specific qualifications in order to get the job?

I wouldn't say any specific qualifications other than Health & Safety.

What do you see as the main responsibility of your particular job?

Just to keep the streets clean I suppose.

Do you have any standards laid down so that you know how clean the streets have to be or is that left up to you?

Well your work's checked and you have a brief description of your duties and what's expected but it's not too complicated.

Do you believe the public believe they are getting a high standard of service?

To be quite honest no.

What makes you say that?

An awful lot of complaints, more complaints than compliments.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious authority?

I don't know.

The person that manages you. How would you describe their style of management? Do they give you any freedom or is it all dictated.

In my job I have lots of freedom (long pause).

In your old job, in the private sector were you managed similarly there?

Yes, in that I had to work away from home all the time so you did not have any management team with you.

How do you know what work you are doing tomorrow and next week? How is work given to you?

It's written down in a book, and each day I follow it. It is pretty much the same day in day out.

Is that effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?

Well I have had a lot of flexibility. I mean if I see a problem as I am driving from one job to another, I can just go and see to it. It's not a problem.

If you have any ideas to change the way things are done, do you get the chance to put them forward?

I would just speak to one of the supervisors and if they think it is worth it they will put it on.

So would you say that your suggestions are welcomed?

If they are sensible, yes.

Do you have any examples at all?

Part of my job is to clear up small parks and we basically remove weeds with a shovel. I asked if I could be given a strimmer. And was told basically yes but I may need to go on a course to use the strimmer. I basically explained how this would get the job done a lot quicker.

Would you say the way you are managed has an effect on the work? Say if you did not have that freedom and were told "just do this and don't do that" that it would affect the standard of work or not?

Yes, as you say when you are out on the street it's totally different to being in the office.

So you have quite a bit of freedom through the day deciding?

I would say I have a lot compared to others.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No.

It's a term with many definitions. The main definition is that if you are empowered you will have a lot of freedom to decide how the work is carried out. Using that definition, would you say you are empowered or not?

It's difficult, within what I do but not total. I am often told to use my own initiative.

You said you have quite a bit of freedom – what is your gut feeling about the rest of the Council. Do you think they all work like that or is it fairly unique to your workplace?

I really don't know. I couldn't speak for them.

From your own perspective would you prefer to have your work spelled out or do you like the fact you can have some say in the work you do?

(Long pause for thought) Both.

Why do you feel like that?

Well, I think you need some ruling on what you have to do but the freedom to deviate one way or another. Again going back to the fact that you are out there where you can see what is actually going on.

Would you say, looking at that term empowerment, that your line manager empowers you and enables you to make a lot of decisions or does he control you a lot?

I am allowed to make quite a lot of decisions (long pause for thought).

Any examples of those decisions?

Not really, no. Nothing I can think of.

So is that better for you? Does it make you feel more motivated?

Not really, no.

So do you think that gives the best performance for the team then?

Yes.

Are you in a little team or do you work alone?

Just the two of us but occasionally I work alone.

Do you allocate work to anybody?

No.

Looking at the way you are managed and the work is there anything you would change if you got the chance or are you quite happy with the way you are managed at the moment?

No I'm given a lot of freedom (long pause).

What would you change if given the chance?

Nothing, some people are never satisfied.

Is there anything you would change in the structure here that would improve performance out there? Particularly the way your managers manage? Do you think they have much effect on the way you work outside?

I don't think they do really. It's a set way of working.

Authority D Transcripts

D1

Can you give me your position within the organisation?

I am now called Head of Street Scene Services, I report to the Director of Community Services, who is a member of the corporate management team.

How have you got to where you are now?

I have been in local government my entire career and worked in Districts and Borough Councils I started off in Waste and Sewerage, drainage work, moved into Highways design and maintenance then environmental maintenance as well as fleet and plan eventually to here.

How many years experience in your current post?

Three and a half years.

Have you needed any specific qualifications to get this post?

I think on the essential criteria I needed a Management qualification and a Waste Management qualification.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post?

In terms of what we are trying to achieve is closely aligned with the Council's objectives and the Local Area Agreement and that is to increase the public perception and satisfaction of environmental and waste services. That is I suppose the general one. It is based around the re-design and the improvement of a whole range of street scene services. You see the things that I cover; I have got Waste, and also Grounds and Cleansing, Fleet and Transportation as well as Highways and Housing Maintenance. Quite a wide remit. About 80 million a year with the capital thrown in. It is improving performance in a whole range of things. Stoke is not a traditional one of a best performing Council although a lot of good practice goes on here. A lot of the services a pretty antiquated and need dragging up by the bootlaces.

Looking specifically at the environmental works what would you see as the key standards that the organisation aims for?

Key standards are going to be BV199 the cleanliness of street and also focusing over the last few years on BV82 recycling standards having missed our strategy targets. So they are the first two, the main two.

Do you believe the public are receiving a high standard of service at the moment?

No – it is higher than it ever has been but I still think we have a long way to go.

What makes you say that?

Because I think when we surveyed the public we asked them what is important on the street scene. As usual things like street cleanliness, graffiti and dog fouling and fly tipping came very high on the list. But it is interesting to note where the actual satisfaction needs are actually low, despite the fact that our BV199 figures are showing that the streets are vastly cleaner than they ever were satisfaction still low and when you dig down under that you find that because of Stokes need for regeneration, shall we say, a lot of areas are run down, a lot of brown field sites are close to dereliction and its those issues that lower peoples satisfaction. Unfortunately or fortunately I can really affect those.

Do you think you are currently working for a high performing and ambitious local authority?

Certainly – well we are currently not high performing, we are in some areas but we are certainly ambitious. We have got a new Chief Exec who has been in position for ten months now and was my director previously. We are aiming to achieve excellence in all our services and by excellence that is top quartile performance. For our three year rolling performance plan is designed to hit top quartile.

Looking at styles you're Director, the Director of Community Services. How would you describe the way he manages you?

He's a she. Hmm to some extent hands off because She would be the first to admit certainly this area of work is not one she has any experience of. She feels more out of her depth here than any other area so to some extent she will leave the strategic decisions and guidance to myself but she will ask searching questions as to how say this can't be done? Why can't we do that? There may be valid operational reasons and she will question and prod and probe just to make sure that I am not ploughing a one furrow and we are actually considering all options. Bear in mind she has only been in post for three or four months.

Have you in your other posts have you always been managed like that?

I think generally yes. I think a lot of the environmental services in many Councils, I think you will agree, are often Cinderella services particularly where it is front line away from the main office base it is out of sight out of mind. No one really knows or really understands and often the Service Heads and Directors are happy to allow people get on with it.

How does she allocate work to you then?

Well in terms of – we have a PDR review – an appraisal process a Personal Development Review and she will set me the key objectives for the year and then in reality the agenda is set by myself anyway. So we have got a small number of key issues that we have got to address and deliver but they are down to me.

Do you think that is effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?

Well I think in reality I do have that say, I do have that say (long pause).

Do you feel you have the opportunity to put ideas forward to your line manager?

Yeah I mean that is the way I operate anyway. A lot of the service improvements were generated from myself and the staff you will be seeing this afternoon. So we are actually starting to drive improvements from the coalface we are not having things done to us now. We are in charge and taking the service forward which is a bit of a step change from what was happening in the past at this place I think.

So would you say that your suggestions are welcomed and tried out?

Yes (long pause).

Do you have any examples?

Yes – we changed the grounds and street-cleaning service to a hotline one pass combined service last year. That was an initiative that came from myself and was driven through by a colleague who you will meet next. It has revised standards. We have increased standards, we have raised performance, we have raised productivity, and we have actually done it within existing costs. Public satisfaction has gone up, BV199 has gone down vastly (note: down is good). That was driven by ourselves. Also part of that we have now got a Council that had a £20 million budget deficit coming into this year but have managed to balance it, we have actually got an extra 1.2 million for

environmental services because we have justified it and linked it through and these are all initiatives we have come forward with.

Would you say the way you are managed affects the quality of the work you have influence over?

Vastly – Vastly (long pause).

Just as a snapshot how much percentage wise is your work prescribed and how much do you feel you have influence over?

I would have said – long pause – Hmm the housing maintenance side is effectively prescribed with tenant's charters and policies on that. The Highways we have got influence over. The Highways responsive maintenance. Refuse - the main service we have got collections but in terms of the weekly, influence over the type of collections but in terms of the weekly, fortnightly we have tried to get through fortnightly but failed miserably but in terms of that the roll out of wheeled bins was down to us, the green waste bin the second collection was down to us as well. We have got influence over that the way we deliver it operationally is down to us. In cleansing we completely re-designed the service that was down to ourselves. The members and the senior management team are looking for outcomes and they are relying on me as service head to deliver to the best that I can.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does that mean to you?

Well in fact it is the way we are trying to move our services now. It is giving people the responsibility and the freedom to deliver, its really about delivering outcomes to some extent outputs and giving the individual to some extent the greater freedom in how they deliver that.

From what you said earlier to you feel empowered?

I personally do yes.

Do you feel that is the same throughout the authority or unique to your team?

It is probably unique to our team. Certainly from what I have said I have been here three and a half years. I cam in the culture and the mood in this division was significantly different. We effectively were the client contractor combined

and a lot of the staff were ex DSO from years ago and it was pretty evident that there was a complete vacuum of management approach or leadership and a lot of people were very switched off. A lot of those people are now gone. I like to think that a lot of the staff we have got left are/do feel more empowered than they ever were before.

Would you prefer to have your work spelled out or have some say in how it is carried out?

Oh some say in how it is carried out.

Why do you feel like that?

Because you get more work satisfaction and more work enjoyment. You feel more part of it there is more ownership of the work and more job satisfaction.

Do you feel your line manager then empowers you?

Yes – yes absolutely.

What brings you to that conclusion?

Simply because the outcomes of the service are agreed between us and in terms of how we deliver that, providing I stay within statute and legality and within budget she is quite happy for me to get on and deliver that. And providing we have still got good Union and Workforce relations and we haven't got people coming out on strike, she is happy for me to get on and do that using the expertise that I have got in this area.

Two questions – Is that best for you and is that best for the performance of the team in your view?

Well it is certainly best for me and in terms if the teams do you mean be being empowered or me empowering them?

Empowering them?

Yes I would have said so – I would have said so. But you have got to get the right staff in the team who can take than on willingly. Some of the staff I have inherited in the past would just run a mile. They wanted everything directing, putting on a plate now that's not the way to manage it now they have retired or moved on. We have got people now who are keen to take the challenge on.

Who do you actually allocate work to in your role?

Well we are just in the throes of devolving a lot of street scene services down to neighbourhood so up until the recent restructure I had four or five group managers but I am now down to only four.

So how do you allocate work to them?

Through the PDR process (personal development review) and one to one meetings and to be honest generally walking the floor. I am not one for doing things at formal meetings. It's a fairly relaxed and inclusive way of getting the teams to work together.

Do you feel it is your responsibility to decide how they should carry the work out?

No – not to any great extent. The only areas that I would have say in for example when we moved to the one pass grounds and cleansing there was no experience in how that would operate here. I had done that before in a previous Council so it was almost a case of saying that this is how we are going to do it.

The intention was once it was in and was bedded in, that would develop in time but in terms of how it was initially put in there were certain aspect which I considered were essential if we were to get standards up so in that respect I did not give them a great degree of latitude in other areas I will expect my managers to look at best practice but for major initiatives where there was no experience. I had to lead from the front to show them exactly what I meant.

Would you say then that you feel you empower your team?

I like to think so – whether they will say that is a different matter. Generally, yes.

What makes you say that?

Because it is the style I have got and it is the way I like to be managed and It can feel the personal benefits from that and it is certainly in terms of my own personal workload delegating staff down the queue and giving people those basic parameters and boundaries to work within, they have got the experience they are closer to the coalface than I am in that respect. And again, provided we are legal and within budget I am happy for them to do whatever they wish.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

Really to take the lead, lead and set that direction and to set the standards of what you are expecting.

In your own area can you give me a couple of examples to support that?

Fleet management moving to a more commercial operation so we discussed it through with the managers as to what I wanted from the service in terms of an internal contract hire approach so other service managers had more of a fixed handle on their costs, this also then forced the fleet side to look at their operation to make efficiencies rather than to just change what it costs and really it was setting these standards and parameters then setting the service develop an approach towards them. I suppose again we do that with certain elements of refuse collection with the ancillary services such as trade waste, skip hire where we set performance requirements and allowed the managers to get on and deliver those.

Is there anything you would change in the way you and your work is managed that you feel would improve the performance?

Managed from above me?

Yes.

It is a peculiar one at the moment because we re devolving services now with managers so it is unique. I think the central control and the central standards setting, the central lead and the central direction of perhaps those services has gone adrift since they have gone down to five neighbourhoods. My concern is that we are going to have five different services operating to five different standards and whilst neighbourhoods have their own unique requirements and they should be differentiated the overall standard of service that we provide, the service offered to the public should still be maintained. So I just feel we have got a bit of an issue there.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that you feel would improve performance?

I think I need to get out more but you know what it is like with the diary. I'm lucky to get a lunch hour most days. That is the only thing to get our more than I do but it is a thankless task at times.

What is the main barrier then stopping this happening?

It is just time management and it is just the number of initiatives and day to day meetings that I am involved in. Literally my diary will get booked up from month to month with early meetings late meetings, meetings over lunch and trying to find a space to go out with a reasonable amount of time. In fact this morning was the first time in months when I met up with a guy to go round our parks. We are going to restructure our parks service. It is the first time I have been out there that for a long time.

D2

What is your position in the structure?

I am the Environmental Services Manager, I report to the Head of Service.

How long have you been in this post?

I have only been in this post for approximately six weeks now. Prior to taking this post up I was Grounds and Street Scene Services Manager. I looked after Highways, Grounds and Street Cleansing.

So what is your combined experience here in this type of work?

I have been in local authority since 1979 starting as a working operative and working up to where I am now obviously taking the qualifications as I needed to.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your role?

I am responsible for all the waste that the City Council generates from domestic refuse to Community Sites. We also run a commercial skip.

Are you a collection and a disposal authority?

Yes we are

I also have responsibility for an environmental section. I am developing an environmental policy and one on climate change, carbon footprint. I have a team next door of six people to deal with this. The other thing I have responsibility for is promoting the service and litter campaigns as well as recycling campaigns.

Are you responsible for any particular indicators or standards?

Yes, hundreds of them. BVP 199. I have been audited three times now on BVP 199, by district, internal and National. This is something I have to do as well as my normal job. With being new to this I was not aware that there was data flow to do. So that produces the BVPI anyway. What I do now is I am going to start using that. That will be good that will.

Looking at your work area in particular do you think that the public are getting a good standard of service?

I think with regard to refuse, I think they are probably getting as high a standard as we can achieve. There are always improvements to be made obviously; we are looking to roll out other recycling initiatives. In regard to recycling we have got kerbside day recycling which is pretty good. I don't think in my limited experience in this role that the recycling take-up is as good as what it can be.

I think we need to push along and make some inroads into promotion. All in all I would say that if I was asked how I would rate it I would say that it was about 85% satisfaction. That's not the actual; I think that is higher than that. That is my personal view.

Would you say you are working for a high performing and ambitious authority?

We are now yes; yes we have got a Council Chief Exec who is striving for excellence. She wants excellence in everything we do so yes.

How would you describe the style that your line manager uses to manage you?

He is one of the best if not the best manager to work for. He is very open, he is very forward thinking, he lets you make decisions and he also is radical in his approach.

He allows a blank paper approach, which is my style anyhow.

Is that the way you like to be managed?

Yes this is probably the best manager I have ever had to be fair.

How is your work allocated?

We have obviously through the Corporate Key Priorities and the PDR's (personal development reviews) are part of it but we also have one to ones where we discuss if we have an issue, do I need any help.

Do you think this is effective? Or would you like more say in the way you can do things?

It gives me, to be fair, at the one to ones and the PDR's the PDR's are certainly discussed and agreed together. And the one to ones just means of ensuring that I am carrying out what he wants me to do plus finding out if I have any underlying problems with achieving what I want to do. The way I am managed is quite effective for my style of management. I know it is not everybody's style.

Would you say at these one to ones that you get the chance to put ideas forwarded then?

Yes, yes, yes my line manager is always open to any ideas, takes stock of them and comes back to you at the end.

So anything you suggest, if you can convince him, he will let you try them out?

Yes he will ask me what things I am going to do and things like that.

From your recent one to ones do you have any example of how your line manager has let you try out one of your ideas?

Yes, Greenhouse 2000. We have a greenhouse and we have a problem with profitability really. We have got to decide whether to keep it or to close it. I am doing a project on that to decide if it is financially viable, putting ideas together. So he has given me that to do so he is quite happy with what I am doing.

Do you think the way he manages you could affect the performance of you or the team?

Yes, I think you need quite a level of management because you don't need people over your shoulder all the time. You need to be allowed to take decisions and have responsibility for what you do and I think that if you have someone right on top of you and directing you then you don't get a flare for it. You would be not radical enough to achieve things, you would be frightened of making mistakes and that would be one thing that I am not frightened of you know. If I make a mistake then I will own up to it.

What percentage of the work you do do you have freedom of choice over and what percentage do you feel is prescribed?

On the waste side a lot o the waste disposal you have to do it a certain way you can't get away from that. Since I have took the waste bit on I would say 30 to 40% of the time I have got to adhere to that because it is regulated and monitored.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does this mean to you?

Well I empower my staff, my staff quite a lot well what it means to me is that my line manager empowers me to do my work and just to get on with it without having to be controlled.

From what you said earlier do you feel that you are empowered?

Yes

Do you think this is unique to your team or is it the strategy for the authority?

I think it is unique to our team and from my team. And the authority well I don't think it was across the authority then. The direction the Chief Exec is taking now is more of an empowering, take decisions take responsibility type of role that what is directing us to do. And whether people will get on board I don't know.

Is that the way you prefer to be managed?

Yes I do.

Why is that?

That's what motivates me. I like to take responsibility. It's a challenge.

So would you say that your line manager definitely empowers you?

Yes.

What would bring you to that conclusion?

Well I am allowed to. It is very very rare that my line manager will try and make a decision or come in and ask me to do something that he has already decided without discussing it.

So the way he manages you is that best for you and best for you and best for your team.

Well I think it is a bit of both because I am new to the team. Not to the Waste side you understand, I am still finding my ground on that. I mean my managers now are finding that there is a different approach from me. They know that I'm no longer; I'm not a person who always thinks to them. As I said I empower them, I give them responsibility and expect them to come up with the goods. And if they need any assistance I will guide them. But I certainly don't expect to make their decisions for them. I expect them to make decisions – reasoned decisions so they are working to our key aims and objectives. This is relatively new to some of the managers I have got and they take a bit of getting used to my style of management. I think they like it yeah, they certainly like it. There is no longer this closed door sort of thing.

Is that the younger ones or the older ones?

In general all of them. I have got two or three of them in there who are relatively old and not only in age but to this job. They have worked for a manager for several years. I have changed the way I am and they have welcomed it. It has given them a bit of a boost really. They like the responsibility, they like making decisions even if they are minor decisions before that somebody else, in this office actually, would have made the decision for them. Whereas now I am saying now look you make the decisions, just be careful, think it through, and if you do get a problem, if you do make a mistake, you know you might get a telling off but well get on with it.

Just on a practical note then who do you allocate work to?

Under myself, I have got four managers and a small team with another manager.

How practically do your instructions get to them? How do you make them aware of the Strategy and the big picture?

We have a case brief every month and the main reason for having that is to filter down the corporate values. At those meetings the intention is although it hasn't happened yet because I am relatively new to the post. The way I have always seen it is to use that meeting to then discuss the operational needs of the business and to get an update from each of the managers telling me where they are with the workload. But basically a lot of the time it is done verbally because we are all not far away.

Do you see that as being your decision then how the work is carried out?

What – the actual work that I want them to do?

Yes

Yes – well I would communicate it to the managers and they would obviously pass it down the line.

How do you involve them? How do you make sure they are involved in the decision making process?

We talk it through. I never ever make a decision without talking it through with managers first. There is occasions where I have to make a decision behind closed doors there is nothing I can do about that but generally I try to involve them as closely as I can.

So do you feel you given them freedom in changing the way they do things?

Yeah – yeah – well eventually yeah. That's what they feel now.

Do you think your style of management could influence the performance of the teams?

Yes because I think it gives them the freedom to change if need be. And develop new systems or whatever is needed to achieve the aims.

What do you see as the purpose of management?

The purpose of management is to – the very basic purpose is to ensure the job gets done – to be fair – within the budgets and constraints.

Looking at the way you are managed is there anything you would change in the way you are managed by your line manager that would improve performance?

To be honest no, because we have got such an open relationship. It is not one of those where there is no fear of going in there and talking to him one to one even when I am not having a one to one, you know I will discuss things with him straight faced because that is how I am anyway.

Is there anything you think looking at your own style you would change so that the people you say you empower can have an impact on what happens out there or do you think style is ok?

Perhaps I could be a bit more, lest just get in there sort of approach.

What do you mean by that?

I would really like to get down and get the meetings shorted, get everything on board but it's finding time in a local authority.

Do you think within your team, including your line manager that there are any barriers that need to be changed and if so how would you go about changing them?

I think they are breaking down, I don't think there are any. I would be very surprised if there are any barriers.

D3

What is your position in the organisation?

I'm the Waste Contracts Operations Manager. So I'm responsible for the operational management of the refuse collection and skip hire service and green waste kerbside collection.

What is your background? How did you get to where you are now?

I've worked for local government since I left school. I started at 16 as an apprentice stonemason and paver in a neighbouring authority and when CCT came in they wanted somebody to go into work study as on the Highways which I got that job. That developed into doing work studies on the refuse and street cleansing service and from there when CCT was abolished I became a client officer for a neighbouring authority, got my HNC and then started moving around and getting more qualifications.

So how many years experience do you have in this particular area of work?

About eighteen.

Did you need any qualifications or experience to get in to this post?

Yes, I did an HNC to start off with so I could get membership with the RWM and then still got an ongoing argument with them. Two weeks before I got my HNC certificate, they changed the criteria and said you had to have a degree to become a member, and even now over the years I've got a load of qualifications and am one of only six people in the UK to hold all four level four certificates of technical competence to manage any waste management facility in Europe. The other one is a guy who works here, we did it together and two of the other four are the assessors who trained as so it's quite an elite club.

Looking at your post what would you say is your key responsibility?

I run the operational side of refuse collection so I deal on a day to day basis with the actual refuse crews and complaints. I also do the strategy work, paying invoices for the energy and waste incinerator which I also manage the contracts for and manage the contracts for waste disposal operations. We operationally manage two household waste and recycling centres within the city, and we hope we are probably going to be taking on seven of the Council's own waste transfer stations one of which is located here the other six located throughout the city, so basically on the operational side on the actual physically doing side I'm responsible for everything, waste disposal and refuse collection side and we also do recycling kerbside recycling green waste recycling. It's a big remit.

Do you have any key standards or indicators that you are expected to achieve.

We have the key PI's the national performance indicators which are too numerous to mention. We were at a meeting of the Regional Waste Managers group yesterday and there was a guy from DEFRA there telling us about the proposed new KPI's for the waste sector. The key ones really are instead of looking at household waste that has been recycled or composted they are going to be looking at household waste that hasn't been recycled or composted which to me is just the opposite side of the coin. Mine is not to reason why.

Looking at your specific service do you believe the residents are getting a high standard of service at the moment?

I do yes, I mean the last satisfaction rate survey placed us about 90-95% which is quite good, and we can do better in some areas.

That was done by Mori the national one and we do slip up our crews aren't perfect by any stretch of the imagination and we can do better in a lot of areas. On average bearing in mind that the average spend per household on waste collection in this City is £35 per year and we do give value for money. We are probably the lowest spend for that KPI in the county.

Do you think that you are working for a high performing and ambitious authority?

I think we are working for an ambitious authority, I don't think we are working for a high achieving authority – but I think that is because they have a long way to go and they are building towards that. The only barrier I would put in against that is the lack of investment. In reality the Council has just let 350 people go early retirement or voluntary redundancy. Four of them from this section so our workload has increased.

Looking at your line manager, how would you describe his style of management?

He is very open. To a degree he relies on me and some of my colleagues because his background is not in waste management. He is a good man manager, but needs to gain experience in actual waste management. We sort of feed off each other. I am learning from him on the man management side and he is learning from me on the waste management side of things.

You describe him as an open manager. In your other jobs have all your managers been like that?

No – the guy I worked for in my last authority, we shared an office and there were days when he has walked in the office and we haven't spoken all day. I have said to him "morning" and he has not answered. He just sat at his desk and did his work.

How does your line manager allocate work to you? How do you know what you will be doing tomorrow or next week?

If he wants me to do a specific task he will hand it to me or e-mail it to me. Nine times out of ten most of what I do I programme myself because it is things that have got to be done to provide the service. But if there is a specific task he will walk down the corridor and ask me to do it. If it is a document he will e-mail it to me.

Do you think that is effective? Would you like more say in the way things are done or do you think the balance is right?

Between me and my line manager the balance is probably right. Between myself and the managers under me then there are things that need to improve. There is a lot of old local authority mentality in there. Not just old local authority it's the worst case scenario you've got old local authority and old refuse collection mingled into one. I'm a moderniser me, I like to improve things and move things forward and there are some people that don't like that. They got rid of the old client/contractor split some time ago so in effect I manage both sides. The managers under me are the old contractor side and they carry out the physical doing of the service. My background is on the client side.

Do you think you get the opportunity to put any new ideas forward?

Yes, yes definitely, there are things that I have done to improve the service that I have put forward and have gone ahead. An example of that is probably the waste permit scheme. We had a big problem with commercial businesses abusing the household waste sites. So I wrote a permit scheme. We have introduced that permit scheme and it has reduced the throughput by thousands of tons saving the Council a lot of money in the process.

You said you currently have an open management style with your line manager. Would you say that could have an effect on the performance?

I suppose it is horses for courses. For me, I do what I do if they want to work like that in their regime. I will go away and do what I need to do. As long as my end is kept up. If I was taking a preference I would take the open style.

A lot of your work is prescribed by statute. What would you say percentage wise could you change the way in which it is done?

The way it is done we can change a 100%. It's the fact that we have to do it. Doesn't matter how we do it we just have to provide that particular service – for example, we have about 24,000 properties in the City still on black bags and in October we are converting them to wheelie bins. It's going to be difficult because they are all terraced properties so they are going to have to bring them to the ends of the alleyways. But the statute says we can make

those changes because we have a duty to collect refuse. It doesn't say how so, you know, that's what we will do.

Introducing wheeled bins I am no stranger to. I introduced 58,000 into my last Council City which most of the buildings in that City are over 100 years old. They were never made for refuse collections never mind wheeled bins. It's a very old City. Depending on which time of year you go. It's under water 3 times a year.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does that mean to you?

Hmm, it means that, for me, I have control and am master of my own destiny, if you like and that I am free to make decisions which I think are right and not necessarily hmm an example of that would be that if I feel the service needs to adjust in some way then I can do that. I don't have to go to him. I know that he trusts me to make those decisions. A lot of it is about trust.

From what you said earlier about the way he manages you do you feel empowered?

Yes (pause) definitely.

Would you say that that is unique to this team or is that an authority wide strategy?

I think it is becoming to be an authority wide strategy. When I first came here it probably wasn't but with the new Chief Exec he's got a management style of, you know, your there to do the job, you do the job, if anything goes wrong, you know, there is no blame culture allegedly. If something goes wrong – It's gone wrong, we sort it out and put something in place to make sure it does not happen again sort of thing, and that's starting to filter down and I am trying to filter that down to my managers because what's happening the guys are bypassing my managers and coming direct to me when they have got a problem and I am saying to them is, you know, there is a line management and your first point of contact should be that line manager and, you know, I trust them to make that decision.

So would you say you –prefer to have some say or would you rather have your work spelled out for you?

I prefer to have some say. If you just let them spell it out to you, you just tend to get lumbered with everything no-one else wants.

Why do you feel like that? What is the benefit to you personally?

You get a mixture then for me because you know, much as I like my job you don't like every aspect, so you know, if you get some bits you like and some bits you don't like, it creates a bit of a balance. The good bits offset the bad bits. Though I must admit just lately, since the re-organisation most of it has been bad bits.

Do you feel he empowers you?

Yes that's why I feel we fitted well together, because I already had that management style. Although I have this style where I am very open and I am honest. I call a spade a spade. A lot of the crews don't like that style because in this particular authority and it is the same in a lot of authorities, there is a serious case of the tail wagging the dog. The bin crews, the refuse men think that they run the service and I come along and am changing that perception - sometimes a bit roughly. They don't like it. The managers under me don't mind it, you know, they see me dealing with a lot of the problems that they had to deal with and have not been backed. Now what I am saying to them is if they have done something wrong deal with them and I will back you.

So would you say that that style is best for you and best for the team?

I think it is best for the team but there will be individuals in that team that don't like that particular style of management and, you know, you have to try and adapt for those individuals.

So in your role who do you allocate work to?

I have four managers. The refuse manager, a skips manager, a trade waste manager and what is in effect a supervisor. They in turn issue that work to the individual crews.

How do they know what they are doing tomorrow or next week?

It's all programmed the refuse rounds are all set in stone (long pause).

So, looking at how the work is done. Do you see that as your decision or their decision? Do you feel that you are responsible?

Yes – and for me I make sure that they know that I trust them to make those decisions. I have got three guys in at the moment who aren't qualified managers. Because my refuse manager comes back on Monday, my supervisor is off and my other manager is on maternity leave. Plus two guys off the refuse crews and one guy off the skips. And they have come in and stepped into the breach and they have done an absolutely fantastic job in the office. I got them in the office and said look, we are going to make wrong decisions but we learn from those decisions and if you think you are making the right decision then go with your gut and if it doesn't work then we adjust it and overcome it. It's just letting them know really that you trust them.

So, how are they involved in decision making? Walking the floor or do you adopt a structured approach?

It depends, because as these guys have got to go back to their crews at the end of the day, if there is any disciplinary to be done then I am dealing with them because I don't think it is fair to let me deal with their crew mates. Dishing out the work and saying can you go do this is fine, but balling them out for not wearing safety shoes is another thing because they have got to go back and work with these guys.

Do you feel you give the teams any freedom in the way they actually carry the work out?

Basically the way it works is that they are given a list of streets to do. When the rounds were initially put in place the crews worked directly with the refuse manager to develop the rounds. If they feel that they should change a day for example or change a number of streets to a different day to balance the round up then they work direct with the refuse manager and they actually physically carry out the work of delivering the day change leaflet and passing that information out to the residents. They feel it's their idea, they own it, if it doesn't work, they are partially to blame for that.

Do you think that freedom impacts on the quality of the service? Does it enable them to make the service better?

I think it does because I think if you're more dictatorial and said you will do it this way, you won't do it that way then I think that stifles initiative and we can't always be there. If we say to them you don't take side waste and then one week and old lady comes in and says I've got this little bag on. You've got

to use your common sense about it. We have got some crews that are like that, you know, they won't take side waste; don't care whether you're the Pope that sort of thing. But a lot of them just use common sense.

Would you say that you empower your teams then?

Yes – definitely.

What brings you to say that? Can you give me some examples?

One example I suppose is that when we introduced the green waste. The first green waste service we actually brought the teams in and said right this is what we have got to do, but they actually developed the service with us and how best to do certain areas because they have that knowledge and background. And because we involved them in it and didn't just say this is the list of streets and that is what you are doing today, we said right these are the areas we are doing, how's best to do them? Give us some feedback, give us some ideas and we actually involved them right from the start. The only thing that comes out in that is the fact that when you see what they do actually on the ground, they are carrying out the checks because they are going into the bins and they are looking for contamination instead of just loading them on the wagon. They are taking a pride in making sure that they deliver clean material to the processor.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

To guide the service in the right direction. To deal with problems.

The way your line manager manages you. Is there anything you would change that you think would improve the performance out there?

It's about right. If I make a decision – if it is going to make a big impact on the service or it is going to have a big impact on the crews and make them have a whinge then I would run it by him first. Nine times out of ten he will say yet go for it. He is of a similar mind to me. The service we have got is a very good service, but there is room for improvement and we are going to make that improvement by tightening up in areas and pushing it forward. To do that you can't make an omelette without cracking a few eggs can you?

Looking at your own management style, is there anything that you would change?

Yes, I think for me better time management. I tend to bounce from one crisis to another, but I think most local authority managers are like that because that is the nature of the job. What we need really is because we have been in turmoil. This is the third restructure in two years. In this particular authority I think there is a lot of change moving too fast.

Are there any barriers to that change?

I think the gates are open but there are still some dinosaurs plodding around the plot.

What would you say the barriers are?

There is a lot of old local authority mentality. I come across it on a regular basis. When I try to change something in the service someone will say "that won't work here. I say to them "why won't it work here? it works over the border and in other Councils". "What's so different?" What's so different about here that people won't understand and won't be able to do it?

Are these people that are working for you?

Yes - I say if it will work elsewhere then we will make it work here. It works everywhere else there is no reason why it won't work here.

Do you think people can change?

I think some of them should be moved on. I know it is cruel to say but in a lot of local authorities, even in this one, and this is quite a modern authority, in some of the authorities I have worked in some of the officers have been complete dinosaurs. You know, we've done it this way for years and there's no reason to change it. They take the attitude if it ain't broken don't fix it.

Authority E Transcripts

E1

What is your position in the organisation?

I am the street care manager. I look after street cleaning, public convenience cleaning, and open spaces maintenance.

How have you got to this position?

I started with this Council 20 years ago during CCT as an inspector then I just rose through the ranks to become parks manager then I got this post.

What training, experience and qualifications did you need for your current post?

I have just worked my way up with no specific qualifications really.

What would you devise as the key responsibilities of your post?

To ensure the streets are clean, the grass is cut, all to a high standard and also to improve the service. To constantly improve the service we deliver.

Do you have any set standards that you have to work to?

There are standards set out in the contract. For example when the grass has to be cut, and when to strim it etc.

Do you feel the public are getting a high standard of service?

Yes, they are getting a very high standard of service.

How would you support that?

Recently a local television crew were in the town centre and they were amazed how clean it was. We do a night owl service so we are virtually running 24 hours a day. In grounds maintenance we have had many awards as well as becoming more economic.

So would you say you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

Ambitious – long pause.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

We have a very good working relationship. Although he is my boss it is still a close working relationship.

Has that always been the case?

Because of the position I am in now I would say the Council managers were far more hands off than hands on.

How is your work allocated to you?

It is handed down and written into the contract. I produce a lot of monitoring reports.

Do you get the opportunity to change the way in which things are done?

As far as the day to day running I am in control of that.

Would you say your suggestions are welcomed and tried out?

I do them on the basis that I am going to try them and if it goes belly up then it's my fault and I will sort it out.

Would you seek reference before you did that then or just get on with it?

I would discuss it with my line manager first if it was going to be radical. If it wasn't going to be radical then I wouldn't I would just carry on.

Do you have any recent examples of changes you have brought in?

Not recent ones no. The work we do is neighbourhood based as much as we can. But some things like say grass cutting can not be neighbourhood based. It just wouldn't work. But neighbourhood working does work to a degree.

Would you say the way in which you are managed could affect the quality of the work?

Very long pause – Well it's not obviously just me. It's also the supervisors. We get inspected by an outside company that is mainly for health & safety but also standards as well. So there is a lot of monitoring of the work. So it isn't just down to me it is down to the supervisors as well.

Have you every come across the term empowerment?

Yes. I think it is a word that is used sometimes too often. It's the buzz word at the moment empowerment. What it means to me is that my supervisors I let them get on with the job. It is their job to make sure it works properly and the same with the team leaders. So I empower them to do that and if I find

that there is a problem we will talk about and I say this isn't working why isn't it working? So it is about empowerment. From the bottom up again because you can't just empower the managers you need to empower your supervisors.

From what you have said earlier would you say you are empowered by your line manager?

Yes.

Do you think that is the same throughout this Council or do you think it is a style unique to your service?

I have no idea at all. No idea. I have never had anything to do with other parts of this Council.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out to you or do you prefer to have some say in how it is carried out?

I have got to have some say or otherwise I would not be in this job.

Do you think that approach is best for you and best for the team?

It's best for everybody.

Who do you allocate work to?

Well the work is there obviously so we know what has to be achieved. The Supervisors will then allocate to the teams. We discuss how and what work is going to be done and we get on with it. Have we got all the staff in? Do we need more staff around to cover? etc.

So how do you get your instructions down through the teams? What methods?

We talk.

Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out?

Sometimes I do feel I need to talk to them and say "look is this really working"? I have been out there and I don't think it really is. We need to talk about how it is going to be done but generally speaking I like to think my team leaders are gonna look at their teams and each tem and area are quite different. So it is up to them to work out how to get the best for that area. We get more community involvement so it is up to them to work it out. I am always there to support them. We have team meetings as well.

So how to ensure they are involved in any decision making?

We have team briefings.

So would you say you empower your teams?

I hope I do. Yes.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

You have got to have good managers to make sure that the workload is A it can be achieved and B that the men are out there actually doing the job.

Including the supervisors because the supervisors are not going to supervise and I don't manage the things like there is enough PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) in stock. General things that people forget about. And machinery. All these things have to be done at one level.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

No locally we run a fairly tight ship here.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that would improve performance?

I don't know you would have to ask my men that? I am fair but firm. That is what my old boss used to say and that is what I hope I am as a manger.

Sometimes my paperwork leaves a lot to be desired.

Are there any barriers to change in this Council?

We still seem to have. We have cleaning; we have grounds, refuse and recycling, streets. They are all the elements that came together however we still see them sometimes as distinct groups rather than being just one big team. Everyone thinks their job is harder than anyone elses. You know "Those lazy people there they only do such and such". They never seem to realise, no matter what you try and we do have them working together quite often. They still think their job is hardest. It would be nice if they could gel together, but I think that the way that they are means that it is never going to happen.

E2

What is your position in the organisation?

I am the street cleansing supervisor.

How have you got to be in this position?

I worked my way up basically from being a toilet cleaner, then a street cleaner, then a refuse driver, then to this job.

So how long have you been employed by this Council?

I have been here since 1994 so 14 years approximately.

Did you need any particular qualifications or experience to get this job?

I didn't have all the qualifications I needed when I took the job on so I had to do a supervisory course.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your job?

My responsibilities are the day to day running of the street cleaning, and making sure we have got the staff to do the job and the vehicles. For the public conveniences I make sure they have got all the chemicals for the public conveniences.

Do you have any National or Local Standards that you are working to? Or do you just decide the standards?

I presume there is a standard we have got to work to but I have not seen anything to let me know.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

Well I give them as high a standard of service that I can for the area I am in charge of.

What leads you to say that?

Well street cleaning wise obviously you have got to keep it to a certain standard. If it slips then you have to get it back to what it should be so I try to keep it in as tip top condition as I can.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious authority?

Ambitious I suppose because they want to get to the top quartile for street cleaning. Trying to enter for the cleanest City Awards.

How would you describe the way you are managed? What sort of style?

I think style wise approachable. If there are problems then we will work together to solve the problems. The main thing to me is being approachable because you don't want a manager you can't approach.

Have you always been managed in that way?

No my last manager was not approachable. He worked on it was his way and that was it. You knew that if he called you in for a meeting that was it he had decided what he was going to do already. My current manager is not like that.

How is your work allocated to you?

The guys out there have a list and a map that they have to go by. They do day to day tasks and the only thing that varies is if they get tickets coming in they have to go off and sort that out. It's day to day.

Is that an effective way of allocating work would you say?

It is yes because the guys then they can see what needs to be done. Obviously we will set the routes out but at the end of the day it's the guys out there that know what wants doing more than we do. So it works out fine.

Do you get the opportunity to put your ideas forward on how to do the work?

Yes – very much.

Would you say your suggestions are welcomed and tried out?

Yes they have been yes.

Do you have an example of this?

Yes, the street cleaning, how to use the big sweepers. We came up with ideas on how to change that. As well as a new rota for weekend working I sorted that out. I put my ideas to my manager and we put it into practice now.

Would you say the way you are managed could affect the performance of the teams?

I find if you are a dictator the blokes tend to tense up and you get less from the staff. That is my impression any how.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over?

I have quite a bit of influence over it because I got out there checking my rounds and if I see stuff that needs doing that is not on the street then obviously I get that sorted out.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No.

It's a well used term with many definitions. The main definition would be where you would be given the authority to just make decisions without having to get permission from your manager. On that definition would you say you are empowered in your job?

Yes.

Would you say that is the same throughout the organisation or unique to your service area?

I couldn't speak for any of the other sections.

Do you prefer to have some say in the way your work is carried out or would you prefer to have it spelled out for you?

To have some say.

So do you feel you are empowered?

Yes.

Would you say the way you are managed could affect the performance of the team?

It does help, yes. It does help.

Who do you allocate work to?

I allocate work to the street cleaning teams, including charge-hands.

How do you pass your instructions down to the teams?

They normally have their own work to do but if something comes in I would ring them up or go and meet them or explain to them over the phone because sometimes you can't always go and see them. But if they are not sure you would go and have a site meeting with them.

Do you think it is your responsibility to decide how the work is carried out?

Long Pause – it's a team effort. Because if it is a team effort they can't come to you and say oh this can't be done, and that can't be done. If they have all had input into it they should be happy with what is to be done.

What steps do you take to envisage they are involved in the decision making process?

Well yes, if I am going to change a round or whatever then I will have a meeting with them and discuss it with them.

Do you think that they know that they have got freedom to act? That they know that you want them to come forward with ideas?

Yes.

Do you think the fact that they can make decisions helps the standards?

Yes it does because if they are out there and they see something you know they will decide whether to do it that day.

So would you say you empower your teams?

Yes.

What do you see as the main purpose of a manager?

The main job is I suppose is to make sure everything is run efficiently.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

No.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage people that would improve performance?

I don't think I would change anything much.

What would you say are the main barriers to change in this Council?

Obviously, if you want to make changes you have to speak to the relevant Council officers.

E3

What is your position in the organisation?

I work in the waste collection team.

How long have you been in this post?

I have only worked for the Council for less than a year. I was in and out of jobs before that. I am actually a carpenter by trade.

Did you need any particular qualifications for this job or have you just learned on the job?

I just got trained up but I also had to learn how to use the computer for the weighbridge side of things.

What would you say are the main responsibilities of your job?

Making sure that the waste coming in and out gets weighed and recorded correctly.

Do you work to any recognised standards?

I suppose the weights and measures act to ensure everything is above board.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service in relation to street cleaning waste collection and grounds maintenance?

Yes it could improve. There is always room for improvement.

What makes you say that?

The biggest issue is the waste from the recycling bring sites at supermarkets. We don't get round them fast enough and it ends up a mess.

Would you say you are working for a high performing and ambitious local authority?

I think they seem happy just plodding along.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

He leaves me to get on with it because I know what I am doing in my job. I go and help the other guys out as well.

Do you like that style of management?

Yes it is quite good just to be left to it. But sometimes you like to be told what to do.

How is your work allocated to you?

I basically just come in and I do whatever work comes along in the day.

Do you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

Yes I have already changed things. I have seen quicker and easier ways to do things and I have just changed it. I just go and speak to the lady in the office though to see that she is happy with it. She has to deal with the information as well.

So would you say your manager welcomes ideas from you?

Yes – minor suggestions.

Would you say the way you are managed can affect the quality of the work?

Yes, it does. It makes you feel as though you have a little bit of freedom so you can change your working style. You don't have to go through a lot of stuff to do that.

Do you get the chance to change much of your work or is most of it prescribed?

Most of it is prescribed but I can change things to speed up the process. I don't think it could get much quicker at the moment.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No.

It's a style of managing people. A way of saying if you want to change things. Just get on with it. You don't need to seek permission first. From what you have said earlier and that definition would you say you are empowered? You could have total autonomy or be totally controlled or come somewhere in the middle. Where would you say you are?

It's a bit of both really. My Supervisor doesn't know how to run the system I use and the assistant supervisor does but my main supervisor doesn't. So I'd go and see him, he will just say to me that is your department you just do what you should do. But then if I just do something I would get into trouble if he disagrees with it.

Do you prefer to have some say in the way your work is carried out or do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you?

I like to be able to be left to use my own initiative really.

So would you say that your manager empowers you?

Yes – To a certain extent on certain things.

Do you think that helps the teams and the performance?

From my part it doesn't really make any difference. But for the other guys it would make a difference.

Do you allocate work to anybody?

No.

Is there anything in the way you are managed that you would change that would improve performance?

No not really.

You said earlier you can change little things. Do you also get the chance to be involved in the bigger picture? To contribute to bigger issues?

No – Little things I can change on my own. But if there was a meeting about other stuff that is going on. I don't get any say in it. At the moment we are having a lot of building work done. They are apparently going to be changing my weighbridge office. They are changing it but they have not spoken to me about it or anything. My only issue is that if it is done how it isn't meant to be then it will be just a waste of time and money. In a way I wish they would let me say what I need with the office so that I can perform my job better. But we don't get a chance though.

Do you know what is going on in the whole organisation? Is information in any way restricted?

I don't get to know what's going on in other departments. It is much restricted.

What is the main method of consultation for the staff? Is it e-mail, newsletters etc?

We get every now and then we get a memo to say what changes are going to take place. We had a memo about the building work. That was the last one we had. We do get informed of what is going on. And we also hear what is going on by the grapevine. A lot of it does get twisted though. So you can never know what is really going on. They keep it you know management is management and we are separate?

What would you say then are the barriers to your ideas getting listed to and any changes happening from your ideas?

Basically, they don't sort of listen. If I said to them I need this in order to do this. It would have to go through a big process and it would probably be a no. Yes there are definitely some barriers there stopping you from doing big changes so there are a few I want to change but I can't.

So is there no mechanism to get that through?

No you can't do it.

Authority F Transcripts

F1

What is your current position in the organisation?

I am the operational manager for the north of the City within Street scene.

How long have you been in this post?

The title is new but my job has stayed the same for the last three years.

How have you got to this position?

I have worked for this Council for 23 years now. I have just come up through the ranks. From operator to Supervisor then came the opportunity for this job.

Did you require any particular qualifications or experience to get this job?

More experience and local knowledge than qualifications. The job becomes easier the more contacts you make.

What would you describe as the key responsibilities of your post?

To keep the City clean, and also under the green charter because I look after grounds as well as cleaner and greener.

Do you work to any particular local or National Standards?

We do. For cleansing we use NI 195 and more local standards for the park side of things. Also customer surveys but mainly standards.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I think it is very high. Yes. I travel about a lot so I see other Cities and I think by comparison we do alright.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious local authority?

I would say yes.

How would you describe the way in which you are managed?

Quite open, quite laid back. I feel I can voice my opinion it is not just one way from the top. I do get the chance to say my bit and I do feel confident in saying my bit.

Have you always been managed like this?

I think we need a period of stability. There have been a lot of changes of staff but I don't think we are going to get it now. It's the way the world is going. Obviously as a new individual comes in they do like to put their stamp on things. But on the whole it is fine.

How is your work allocated to you?

Obviously in street scene we have an operational plan. I have got my bits that I am lead officer for within that plan. There is an area of the City that I am responsible for. I also am the lead on the fleet.

Would you say you get the opportunity to put your ideas forward?

I would say yes but I would also add to that we just go ahead and try them we do not need his permission to try things. We would take the rap if it fails though.

Do you have any recent examples?

I have got lead on fleet and we need to reduce it. How we do that is totally down to me on how I want to reduce it and what I want to replace it with. So I have the free will on how I will get that 20% down.

Would you say the way you are managed could affect the quality of your work?

I am conscientious anyway so I have my own personal targets. I would see myself as being quite easy to manage because I set myself quite high standards. It fits in line with most of the policies we have anyway.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over? As a %.

I could change about 30%. I think that is more through budget restrictions than anything else. Obviously when we are buying stuff we are buying it over a period of time. You can't change some things instantly you have got to plan it over a number of years.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it?

Basically what I am allowed to do and what I can and can't do. Where I fit into the organisation.

Would you say then, from what you said earlier that you feel empowered?

Yes I do, yes.

Do you think that style of management is part of the culture of this Council or is it unique to your service area?

I think it is new. It has come in recently to the Council I would imagine.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or do you prefer to have some say in it?

I like the say to be honest. The City is split into three areas. They are all different so there is not a one rule fits all. Within my division there are six separate smaller areas and even they are different. So there is no hard and fast rule as to how the work will be done. We have to chop and change things on a day to day basis.

We have a dedicated person to monitor our performance on NI 195. They sit independent outside of operations. It has been assessed a number of times and always comes through with flying colours.

So would you say that you are empowered?

Yes.

Would you say that is good for you and the team?

Good for me and the team.

Who do you allocate work to?

It has just changed now. Since Christmas. I now have two team leaders and six supervisors. I should go through the team leader to the supervisors but I don't feel I need to. I feel I can go straight to the supervisors.

How do you issue the work to them?

We have officially weekly meetings but we also meet every day. And we have various notice boards.

Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work is carried out?

Not solely no. It is the team. Very much the team.

Do you have any formal process to ensure the teams are involved in the decision making?

Again it is down the empowerment route. A lot of our supervisors do various estate inspections and all the different bodies go to various community groups. They have to react to whatever needs doing. The work I tend to give them comes from top down but they gather most of the workload themselves.

So, what freedom do you feel you give your teams in the way the work is carried out?

To be honest most of my staff are very much old timers in the old way of thinking and it has been hard work to get them out of that. But now with the way the public realm is managed, I have got to admit they are all taking it on board. So it is quite easy because I have got a willing workforce. They are adaptable to change in fact they quite like change.

Do you think that has improved the service?

Yes very much so. We used to be very much down the old silos whatever you want to call it. There were very strict boundaries to what we did and did not do. Street cleaning and grounds maintenance were put together under street scene and for a long time it was that's street cleansing and that's grounds maintenance. We have just broken the boundaries down from that's grass and that's road. It doesn't matter now who does it. A supervisor works to a ward now. He is responsible for everything in that ward now. But he is also responsible for reporting things on any private bits of land. So it has empowered them to look after the whole of the area and I think they have enjoyed it. I suppose it is not very nice if you are getting some criticism but on the whole they are getting a lot of praise for the work that they do so it encourage them. It is self motivating really.

So would you say you empower your teams?

Yes.

What would define at the main purpose of management?

Working together basically. Within a Council this big you can't do anything on your own. Working together and good communication.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

I think communication could get better. Sometimes it's just an oversight when you are not copied into various things.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage people that would improve performance?

Training. We have a very poor training record. It goes back to the CCT days when the training budgets were all cut quite drastically. They have never quite been put right properly. We have gone through this void over the past few years. Training has been quite poor so we need to catch up.

What are the main barriers to change in this Council?

I think staff attitudes have got to change running the front line. Some still live in the past when it comes to the CCT days and various things. But I think it is setting the right policies and sticking with them. And that is where the Councillors and the politics come in because they think they can overrule various things and look for short cuts. But if you have got clear and good policies you have got something to work to then. They can chop and change a bit too much.

F2

What is your position in the organisation?

I am an operations manager in the street scene section of the Council.

How long have you been in this position?

Almost three years now covering a range of services including the city centre, trees and cemetery service.

Have you always done this type of work?

Yes I have been with this Council for 28 years now. I started on the old YTS (Youth Training Scheme). So it has worked out for me eventually over the years. I find it useful because the new people who come in want things

straight away but I tell them I understand. I have been there but you need to get your experience first.

Did you need any specific experience or qualification to get your current job?

Primarily it was based on experience. Over the years I worked in horticulture, grounds maintenance then it developed in trialling a mix between grounds and street cleaning. So obviously that was a great deal of experience that was advantageous in getting me this job. I have done the NEBS qualification as well and CMS.

What do you describe as your key responsibilities in this post?

My key responsibilities are service delivery, trying to deliver what we say we are going to deliver. Also developing that service because it is an ever changing environment. In the last few years this city is becoming a 24 hour city so we need to be more flexible with our services. There is also a bigger focus now on budgets. Budget pressures there is a bit of a juggling act to continue to deliver the services. It is not an easy task.

Do you work to any particular standards?

We have got the BVPI indicators that we work to. We have set a standard to the City Centre which is 1%. That is a real challenge to say the least.

Would you say the public are getting a high standard of service?

I would yes.

What makes you say that?

Well obviously being on this side of the fence with my knowledge of the work we are carrying out. Issues we are faced with and how we deal with them. We are doing a good job. There is probably more we could do but I think the emerging issues now are barriers. Who is responsible for what. Enforcement and changing public behaviour. The way people see things and understand things.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

A mix really. We have a formal meeting every month. And an informal one every on a Monday morning. That will be to pick up on issues from the previous week and any actions arising from the monthly meetings. And then

we will forward to the coming week with any issues. Forward planning as well.

How would you describe the style of management?

Quite relaxed but formal. Approachable you know. It's a pretty sort of open environment. You can say what you feel. I would say we are working together to solve issues.

Have you always been managed like that?

No certainly in the early years when I was working on the front line in grounds maintenance for example. It was very much a "this is what you are doing". And certainly when it comes to plant & equipment as well my experience was if there was a new piece of equipment or plant needed it would just arrive whatever it might be. We never got a say. But I am very much an applicant of involving the front line staff in decisions like that. It's very much about involving people in the process so that if we do change things and implement a new procedure they know all about it. So there are no barriers.

So would you say you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

Yes – I mean it is structured in a certain way. There are certain issues that we will address every week such as health & safety and things like that but it is a two way opportunity.

Do you have any recent examples of any ideas or suggestions that have been tried out?

Yes, things like the way the night shift works. We are just now seeing gaps with the evening service that we provide. We are going to improve that on a trial basis. In the teams at my level one person may flag up an issue and we will work together to come up with a way forward. The line manager will facilitate that. There are also one to one meetings.

Would you say the way you are managed could affect the quality of the work?

Yes I think it does affect the quality of the work. Because if you are not managed in the correct way that affects the moral of the workforce. And that then affects the quality of the work. Never mind anything else whether they have got the right tools or not. It's quite a complex issue but yes it is very important how people are managed. At the end of the day you can get things

wrong but you have to be big enough to accept that and learn from it. You are learning from things everyday really.

How much of your work is prescribed and how much do you feel you have influence over?

I think a large amount of what I do I have influence over. I am given a pretty free reign to be fair with what I do.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes

How would you define it?

I think it is about giving ownership of things to people whether that be empowering a Supervisor to do something and take ownership and feel that they are able to raise a concern or an idea whatever that might be through the system.

So from what you said earlier do you feel empowered?

Yes I do.

Do you think that is unique to your service area or does this Council adopt that style throughout?

I think it is possibly extended past my area of coverage but it is a difficult one.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or do you prefer to have some say in the way it is carried out?

I prefer. I do like to be able to change and adapt things and have a reasonable amount of control over what I am doing. I think sometimes it doesn't do people any harm to be told either. You need boundaries. You have got to have some. And sometimes they are not palatable. They are not perhaps what you want but at least you are clear. I hate it when there is a situation when you are not quite clear on something.

So would you say you are empowered to just get on with the job?

Yes.

Would you say that is good for you and the team?

Yes I think it is good for the team really. But you do need to be strict on yourself though because that can be abused. You need to be accountable at the end of the day. That's just how it is.

Who do you allocate work to?

I allocate work to four Supervisors and a team leader. Sometimes I will feed directly into the team leader below him. It would depend on the circumstances.

And how do you allocate the work to them?

To a certain extend there is a programme of works for all of them really for the different areas. But the City centre which is a high priority, and a high profile area we would generally have a meeting on a Monday afternoon with the teams following on from my Monday morning meeting with my line manager to bounce things out. Also I have monthly meetings with them. But if there is anything that pops up in between those then we will meet more often than that.

Do you feel it is your responsibility to decide how the work is carried out?

Long pause – Not entirely no. With the City centre group they have got their staff and resources to hand. And we will discuss who is doing what and how it is all fitting together on a Monday afternoon for example. But to a certain extent they are given a fairly free hand to mix and match and do whatever they need to do.

How do you ensure your teams are involved in the decision making process?

In terms of plant and equipment for example. That is an integral part of our meetings now. So there is a section to discuss plant and vehicles that is included at the weeks meeting. Now that may be to update me that there is a vehicle off the road but it is also at that point we will discuss vehicles that are coming up for replacement and what I shall say for the supervisors then is "This is up for replacement we need to start looking at what we re going to replace that with. Or can we extend it for another 6 months or a year. If we are looking at a replacement then I will task them with finding replacement vehicles that we can have on demo, try things out get staff involved on the front line and I will dip in and out of that then. So there will be a process of

trying different vehicles and listening to what people have got to say. So as long as it is constructive criticism for example. Then at the end of that process hopefully we can get the budget correct and order a piece of kit. Then when it arrives everyone is on board with it. Sometimes we will have to overrule somebody's thoughts on something. I think it works well though. It's a good way of doing it.

So what freedom do you think you give your team in deciding the way in which the work is carried out?

I think there is a reasonable amount of freedom there. It is changing methods and ideas. I like to think that the Supervisors can shout up you know and say can we try this particular role this way or that way?

Do you think that approach can affect the quality of the work they do?

It can do but you have to keep an eye on things. You know people can have the best intentions in the world but you have to be careful that they are not just focused on one small part of the bigger picture. Whilst they might think they are solving things and are coming up with new ideas that could have a knock on effect elsewhere. You can't give them a completely free hand just to do what they like. It still needs to be managed in the appropriate way.

So would you say you empower your teams?

I would like to think so.

Do you have any recent examples to support that?

I would say the City centre teams and the weekly meetings are the most recent examples. But there are a number of items that are set in stone such as "you need to do this and I need to do that". But then there will be others such as plant and equipment where we will try different methods and different machinery. You are trying to introduce flexibility of staff you know. You are trying to encourage them to train up the staff to use different types of equipment whilst they have got the existing routes for example and machinery. So one it is changing the frontline staff in a range of duties increasing their skills. It also helps us with flexibility when people are off.

How would you define the purpose of management?

The way I see it we are here to operate a service on behalf of the public. And to manage it accordingly. Hopefully within budget but we are also here to be a link between the coal face and the Councillors members and the public that wants a say in things.

Do you think the way you are managed could be changed in a way that would improve performance?

Possibly there are times when you could do with just being told that say “this needs to be done”. I think that sometimes deadlines can be a bit loose. That is alright sometimes but I don’t think it does anybody any harm to have deadlines set.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

I think my only criticism at the moment is that as I am involved in three very different types of service. City centre cleansing, trees and cemeteries. There is very little overlap between the three. I tend to think that I am fire fighting quite a bit of the time. I sometimes feel that I am not giving enough focus on those pieces of that jigsaw. You can get so concentrated on one of the services that you don’t give enough time to the others. The City centre takes up a lot of my time. I don’t feel I am achieving what I could be achieving. That is just a personal feeling.

What are the biggest barriers to change in this Council?

Budgets, flexibility of staff. I think at the end of the day we all want as easy a life as possible. We all want a nine to five or whatever it might be but I think that all staff right down to the front line need to understand it is a changing world and the pressures that are on us. They need to be prepared to adapt to whatever those changes may be.

F3

What is your current position in the organisation?

I am a supervisor in the street scene section.

How did you get to that position?

I have worked for this Council for over 25 years now. I started as a bin man. I spent 15 years on the bins then changed. I moved over on to the street cleaning operation and 10 years ago I started driving the different pieces of street cleaning plant. Then through that I did a couple of training courses to end up now as a supervisor. I was a working foreman before becoming a supervisor.

Did you need any particular qualifications or experience to get this job?

In the main it has been experience built up on the job but I have done various courses since I moved over on to the Supervisory side of things. NEBS and other Supervisory management courses. So I have done other front line courses and courses involved in the work that we do.

What do you see as being the key responsibilities of your job?

To deliver a cleansing service for the area I am responsible for and to the satisfaction of the public out there, the tax payers and my superiors.

Do you work to any particular service standards?

Yes there are the National Indicators that we are monitored against. We have a monitoring officer who monitors us against the standards. He grades the different areas around the City and we get told what our particular grading is for that month and maybe then highlighting where we have gone wrong and where we need to do more work.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I think they are getting better standards of service that they had had in the past. It has improved quite a lot over the past couple of years. Definitely in the City centre where I work we have. I think it is just there for anyone to see.

What brings you to that conclusion?

I think we have now got more resources available so that obviously helps. When I came into this particular area of work we were running with three or four barrowmen and a couple of sweepers. We have your got a helluva lot more resources both staff and plant. Plus we also cover a larger time frame now. It is also more organised now and more structured than it used to be. So ultimately I think yet it has improved.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious local authority?

Yes I think we are high performing. We have won awards for cleanest City and Britain in Bloom. If the Council leader on his travels sees something he is not happy with we will soon get to know about it. Having visited other Cities you know that you are as clean if not cleaner than them.

How would you describe the way in which you are managed?

He doesn't dictate to me. You know he will say what do you think about things. He will invite my opinion. He is fine we will talk things out and if he wants things doing in a particular way he will explain that. He won't just say this is what we are doing, do it; he will say we are doing it because. That's if I disagree with but no we are fine. He is a reasonable chap and we have no problems.

Is that the way you have always been managed in the past?

No I have the full spectrum. I have had some arseholes. I have some that think they know what they are doing but don't and I have some that did know what they are doing and are decent blokes so I suppose it is the same in any job really.

How is your work allocated to you?

We have a particular area of the City that we are responsible for. The outer areas are operated on Council Ward areas. So you have got your area and you are responsible for the cleanliness in that area. You have your men and your kit but it is pretty much your decision how you deploy them. To the best way of doing the job.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or would you prefer to have some say in the way your work is carried out?

If I have got any complaints I will take them to my line manager. If there is any kit that needs replacing or stuff that I am not happy about, then if he can't do anything about it he will take it further up the line.

Do you feel you get the opportunity to put your ideas forward?

Yes.

Would you say your line managers welcome ideas and is prepared to try them out?

Yes – if I suggest something he will say give it a go and let me know.

Do you have any recent examples?

Yes – we have changed things recently with one of the routes. He said do it and if it works fine. If there are any problems let me know.

Would you say that the way in which you one managed could affect the quality of the work?

Yes I would say the way in which anyone is managed affects the quality of the work. Because if you have got a bloke in charge of you who you have got no respect for and you can't get along with you will get poor performance. If you have got somebody you enjoy working for with a bit of give and take.

How much of your work is prescribed and how much would you say you have some influence over?

I think I could change as much as I wanted to really. If I thought you know within reason. The attitude of my line manager is you sort of run that job and deliver what we need delivering and if you need to make changes to things in order to do that then do them. So but obviously keep me informed.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it?

I would describe it as giving another person who works for you the where with all to take control of the job they are doing.

From what you have said earlier do you feel that you are empowered by your line manager?

Yes.

Do you think that approach is unique to your service area or applies throughout the Council?

Probably not throughout the Council but it is hard to say because there is a lot of focus on those types of issues. There has been training programmes

here to get people to deliver that type of thing so it probably is widespread around various parts but it is not throughout.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or do you like to have some say in the way it is carried out?

Well obviously I would like to have some say. If I am given a job to do and told how to do it and if I know that is a good method to do the job then I don't mind doing it. But if I am told to do something in a certain way and I know for certain that that isn't the best way of doing it but I am told to do it regardless then I won't be happy.

So do you think that style of management that gives you some freedom is good for you and the team?

Yes and it is probably good for the team. Because I have come up through the ranks and I can do the job I know what the problems are or how they do the job and where they skive, so if I am asking him to do something I know what the pitfalls are and what they may have to face. Somebody who hasn't wouldn't know that so I do think it helps.

Who do you allocate work to?

There are 20 blokes in my area and they all have various tasks. All the blokes who operate the various pieces of kit all do the same job. They all have set routes to do so everybody has got set work on their particular job. So that pretty much runs as it runs for 95% of the time. But you would review it if you get problems. You would tweak it. So I don't sort of allocate different things every day. Things run pretty much the same day to day.

So what systems do you use to allocate your work to your teams?

Daily contact is just done through mobiles. All the lads have mobiles. So if anything crops up through the day then that is how we would contact people. Or he would have a monthly team meeting for anything that had cropped up that month. I use that to pass on to them anything I have had passed on to me from my line manager. So any work issues that have cropped up in that four week period we will talk about and anything they want to talk about we will talk about in any other business at the end of the meeting. Or any queries or problems I will try and sort out with them.

Do you feel you are responsible in deciding how the work should be carried out?

Partly yes. Obviously there are policies that are made from above that I have to stick to. But the day to day doing of the job I pretty much decide how it is carried out.

Do you take any steps or have any systems in place to ensure your teams are involved in the decision making process?

No. They are not really involved in that sort of decision making no. Although if things are going to change I will ask the people it is affecting their opinion. What they think is good or bad or the position or negatives of that and anything I think may be relevant for me to pass on. If it is useful information one way or another then I will pass it on.

What freedom do you feel you give your teams in deciding how the work is carried out?

I give them freedom yes. If one of the lads comes to me and says for example we have got problems on such and such a round say the water board is in the way. So we are going to leave it till last tomorrow then I will say. "If you think it will work better like that then just do it".

So do you find they would come to you first to okay it rather than just do it and tell you afterwards?

In the main but I have got a couple who will just go and do stuff but I will say hallo what's going off. Well I just thought. Oh did you now. Well let me know in future please.

So do you feel you empower your teams to just change things?

I am happy for them to use their initiative because a lot, well I have got one or two with tunnel vision. Who will only do what they think they absolutely have to do. Because that is how it is laid down. They say work that's not my work so I'm not doing it. But if someone is driving past something and they think it ought to be done and they just do it then yes I am happy with that. That way they are using their initiative and it is a problem solved even before it gets to me.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

From my own point of view my main purpose is to deliver a service for the people of the City and for the management above me. And to try and keep the workforce happy because if they are happy they are going to do the job.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

Yes. They could get a shift on when we need new kit for a start. It seems to be a never ending process when you want new stuff. So things like that really.

So what about you. Is there anything you would change in the way you manage your staff that would improve performance?

I think sometimes I am a bit slack when I think I should be a bit firmer. Sometime I think you know. I should have said something there. I should have bollocked him.

What do you see in this Council as the main barriers for change?

I think we have a good deal of support in my service. That is why things are now improving. There are times when I think things move slow but we have had our support. The people above me do raise things and do their best to sort them out.

Authority G Transcripts

G1

What is your position in the organisation?

I am the service manager for street cleaning.

How have you got to this position?

I have worked for this Council for nearly 33 years. I have worked my way up and changed jobs. I have had this job for 3 years now. I had to apply for it in the restructure.

Did you need any specific qualifications or experience to get this job?

No not particularly for this post but I think if they were advertising it again they would be asking for someone with an NVQ level 4 or a degree.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post?

It is the managing of the service both from a budget point of view and a resource point of view. Just making sure that the legislation is followed as well.

Do you work to any recognised standards?

We have been through CCT so the standards we work to are from the specification laid down there. So that specification is laid down and is still worked to. But there is new legislation with performance indicators.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I think they are getting a reasonable standard of service but I don't think it is being appreciated by the public.

Why do you say that?

Well the streets are reasonably clean and the glass is regularly cut. Weeds aren't too bad, shrub beds are tidy and trees are pruned. So they are getting a reasonable service.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

They would like it to be but we are not there yet. We are probably in the mid range. The budget issues are causing a major pressure at the moment. Budgets from main line services tend to get cut unfortunately.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

Very relaxed. It is very much an open door policy. Deadlines are set but it is very much a relaxed style.

Has it always been like that with your previous managers?

No I Have experienced all kinds of managers from a Bully through to the way I am managed how to be honest.

How is work allocated to you?

There are instructions that will come down ad hoc but we also have a formal meeting once a week where we will sit down and discuss issues. That is as a group of managers but once a month we also have a one to one meeting. So that is basically the formal process.

Is that effective?

Yes I think it is because we have got open discussion at those meetings where we can discuss all the issues so it is good.

At those meetings do you feel your ideas and suggestions are welcomed and tried out?

Yes, we have an action plan that comes out of our one to ones. They have timescales so it is almost like a performance plan.

Can you tell me of any recent examples?

Well recently the budget issue about the budget savings for this year. Although they were meant to be temporary. I came up with suggestions that as well as cut the budgets also at the same time made the service better.

Would you say the way in which you are managed can affect the quality of the work?

Oh yes it does definitely. I have had a manager that gave very very tight deadlines and made you stick to them. That gave you a different point of view and yes there are different ways and it does work.

How much of your workload would you say is prescribed and how much do you feel you have some influence over?

I probably have some influence over 80% of my work and the other 20% isn't down to me.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it?

It is me making the decisions over what I do and what others do over the service area. So I suppose it is me making sure that the business works.

From what you said earlier about the way in which you are managed do you feel you are empowered?

Yes – a little too much if I was to be honest. It hasn't gone as far as abdication but certainly it can be at times. Well that's how I feel.

Is that his style?

Yes.

Is that unique to your service or is that style used throughout the Council?

No it is just his style. He has only been here two years. No it is not the normal style no.

Does the Council have a policy of empowering its managers?

They do but perhaps not as much as my manager will condone. He is probably more than normal.

So is he told strategically that this is our policy?

There is a policy of empowerment but he perhaps is applying it a little too liberally.

Do you prefer to have some say in the way in which your work is carried out or would you prefer to have it spelled out for you?

I prefer if this way. If there was anything that I would change it would probably be tighter deadlines because I can put things off at the moment and I perhaps shouldn't.

So do you also feel empowered?

Yes I do. And I tend to delegate things down to my managers a well. So I feel I do yes.

Do you think that style is best for the performance of the team?

Yes I do, yes.

Do you think that style is best for the performance of the team?

Yes I do as long as there are things that are open and discussed and as long as there are things that there is a reassurance that you don't just delegate it out. I mean almost abdicate it. It does need to be delegated and there needs to be a result from it.

Who do you allocate work to?

I have four operational area managers.

How do you physically allocate the work?

Through a fortnightly management team meeting. But I will also see them on a one to one basis to discuss issues.

Do you feel it is your responsibility to decide how the work should be carried out?

Not on a day to day basis but on if you like there is an allocation of work. But on a day to day basis no I don't.

Do you have any formal steps or processes to ensure your teams are involved in the decision making process?

No well we sit down with the different work groups such as the Trade Union work groups and the health & safety work groups. The managers certainly have depot meetings as well. So there are various groups that people will sit down and discuss work with.

What freedom do you feel you give your teams in deciding how the work should be carried out?

Well, we allocate work through a corporate computer system on a fortnightly basis so we will allocate all the work to a team or an area or a site. And provided that work gets done the manager or the team leaders and the operatives get that work carried out. I don't dictate how it is to be done obviously if it is done once a week it is done once a week. I don't go down there and check it off.

Do you think that approach has a positive or a negative impact on the performance?

I think it is a positive process. We used to have a bonus scheme for completing the rounds in grounds but I was brave enough to get rid of it. We moved completely away from bonus and we had now a salary and actually the work productivity went up. We brought it in by managing performance. It is all about managing performance at the end of the day and provided in most case if the allocation of the work is there and that work gets done then most of it follows on from there. It is only when any of the work doesn't get done that the problems start. And as long as you are actually on the ground you have staff checking that the work has been done then you can pick up any hiccups in that process.

So would you say you empower your teams?

Yes I do definitely.

What brings you to that conclusion?

Well because I don't have to chase them to get the work done. Although they will get allocated the work. I delegate the budgets down to the operational managers. The whole work is allocated to the manager but he then allocates it down to the teams or sites. With that cascade of information they know that they have got to do that work. They just go on and do it. We don't chase them to do it. They get on and do the work. We just make sure that it is being done. It's not us chasing the information or the complaints. It's just seeing it being done on the day and making sure.

What would you describe as the purpose of management?

We are just a conduit in a process of getting a service being delivered. They could do without me almost. Provided those at the bottom all know what they

are doing. But if you have got everyone at the bottom doing their bits then it is only a co-ordination process at the end of the day.

Is there anything you would change in the way in which you are managed that would improve the performance of your teams?

From a personal point of view if someone had gave me sharper targets and clearer instructions it would have been better. That is a personal point of view. And that would then in turn I suppose make me give some targets that at the moment I feel I am allowed to let slip so I do and that gets me at times stressed out. Even though I know I have to do them. So it is a vicious circle sometimes.

Is there anything you would change in regard to your own management style that would improve performance?

I really struggle with delegation would you believe. I really, really do struggle. I am better than I was because I have had to work at it. It is one conscious thing that I do. I find it very difficult to just stand back and let someone else do it.

What do you think is the reason for that?

I think it is because one I want to make sure it is being done and being done correctly. And secondly because I have been where they are I am conscious of the pressures they are under, which then leads me back to the other one. Will they get it done? Because I know the pressures they are under to do it. So it is having an understanding of where they are. So it's about the targets and all the other bits and pieces again. So if I am giving them more work so it is about delegation.

If there were any big plans to change things in your service where do you feel the main barriers would be in this Council?

We are currently going to change the grounds maintenance service but only really at an operational management level. I haven't gone into it headlong. I have thrown ideas around but it is to give them ideas to think about. I have given it at team leader level and at Supervisor and manager level. So it is also my head of service involved. So I have given them ideas of where I am coming from. I have almost laid out a structure for them, not a detailed structure. I am making them think about what they want out of the process. I

have said these are the reasons why I want to do this structure. Come back to me if you think I am doing it wrong and I feel that is giving them, well we sat down and had a real conversation about it last week about the whole process and it didn't throw up too many surprises which is good news. They didn't understand where I was coming from in some cases but I will now explain it to them. They now understand why I have done it and what it gives them. So it is making sure that they are fully on board as changes happen and I have tried to do that at all levels to be honest because we have inherited it, or we are about to anyway, a parks service. A grounds maintenance section. They were all separately organised and managed but they are now coming across to me. We aren't doing a full connection yet. I say yet because I feel it will have to. Those staff I have been to see and I have discussed the changes. There will be very little changes to start with. But I felt I needed to go and talk to them to get them to understand how I was managing the process. So I am very much an open person with an open style of management and I think that has worked because in the past when we have had difficult issues to talk about it has been open and honest. Perhaps sometimes too honest. But that is my style I suppose. But it has worked.

G2

What is your current position in the organisation?

I am the operations manager on one of four contracts.

How long have you been in this position?

Basically I have worked my way up through the ranks. From trainee to gardener to charge hand to team leader then senior team leader and supervisor then this job.

Did you require any specific qualifications or experience?

Several training courses on supervision and Health & Safety but mainly experience and contract monitoring.

What would you say are your key responsibilities?

Basically making sure that the workforce understand what they have got to do on a day to day basis. If there are any problems on that day they need to contact me. And giving the workforce instructions so that the public out there

know the work we are doing for them. Trying to keep two parties happy. And the workforce.

Do you work to any agreed National or local standards?

It used to be BV 199 but now we are working to NI 195. So yes there are standards that we work to and we get benchmarked on various indicators and targets.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I think they are getting as good a service that we can provide with the resources that we have got. Obviously we would like more staff but obviously money is tight and we have all got to make savings. But I don't think they get a bad service for what resources we have got. I really don't.

Do you think you are working on a high performing and ambitious Council?

Yes they have got visions. They want to get that extra star. We went up to a 3 star rating but we have stopped there. They want to get back up to excellent or 4 star rating I believe. They are not going to sit still until they have got it and I believe they will.

How would you describe the way in which you are managed?

Well we have weekly meetings but if we can't have them we have them every two weeks. So if there is a problem I would just go and see him. He is a good manager. I have got to be honest with you. He is a good manager.

How would you describe his style of management?

He is an open manager. He allows us to make decisions outside. Obviously if there is a decision to be made higher up than we can then we will come and see him. He will let us know but if it is a decision he can't make it will go higher. But yes he leaves it pretty open to the operation managers. He leaves the operations staff to us.

Have you always been managed like this?

Basically all my managers have been the same to me.

How is your work allocated to you?

Well obviously there is seasonal stuff. We are just gearing up towards our start in April. Our stuff is scheduled so we have to make sure it is carried out as and when it should be. Non scheduled work is when we can just make a decision. When we can just tell the staff they have got to move off from one job on to another. That is left to us the non scheduled work. Priced work and other work that we do is really seasonal. But we all have scheduled work.

Do you feel you get the opportunity to put ideas and suggestions forward? To change the way things are done.

I have actually yes because we have a problem with one area where the street cleaner were in. So I just changed the days round. It is okay to do that if it is not too critical to the service. We can change as and when. And if the service manager, my line manager thinks it's a good idea he will stick with it. If we do change stuff and it doesn't work we will go back to the old ways.

So would you say your suggestion are welcomed and tried out?

Yes we try them yes.

Would you say the way in which you are managed could affect the quality of the work?

I think it does. If you manage your staff well and they respect you I think you get more out of your staff and I think the quality of work will show in that. If you treat them in the way you would want to be treated you will get a better quality of work. I really do.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over?

In a week if I have to change stuff I will just change it. I will just make a phone call. To change a crew round or move a crew from one area to another. On a daily basis I could have to change a crew round.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

I have heard of empowerment yes.

What does it mean to you?

To be honest I don't know but I have heard of it. I have heard of it a couple of times recently as well.

It is basically a term to describe being allowed to change the way things are one without having to check that it is okay to do so first. To have the freedom to act. On that definition would you say you are empowered?

Yes I would say we are empowered. I wouldn't say we have 100% freedom but we can move we can do stuff. Obviously if it came to the crunch we would have to see our service manager.

Do you think that approach is unique to your service or is that the way it works throughout this Council?

Within our service area I think the managers have got a pretty free hand to be honest. Other services I don't know if their managers make the decisions.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or would you prefer to have some say in the way it is carried out?

I prefer to have some say in it. Obviously the service head stuff obviously you can't but I think everyone has their own opinion on how they would like to do the job.

Why do you say that?

I think sometimes being out there with the staff and having a closer working relationship with them you can see how they want to work.

So do you feel you are empowered by your line manager?

Yes in a degree yes. He comes along and we have got tasks to do daily. Yes if there is something he wants doing he will tell us he wants it doing.

Would you say that approach is best for the team?

Yes I would say it is best for the team really.

Who do you allocate tasks to?

From the senior team leaders to the team leaders to the operatives. We can allocate tasks to the support teams as well. Also, the admin staff and the inspectors. It amounts to around 30 to 35 staff in total.

What process or systems do you use to ensure instructions are passed down to them?

In the summer there are job tickets because the work is scheduled. There are schedule tickets. They get handed out to the team leaders who then hand them out to the crews. You have to rely on them to get the work tickets given out but I like to go down and see that they are being given out.

Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out?

Can be with some jobs but not with all of the jobs. The team leaders out there are more than capable of taking instructions and going out and doing the work.

What steps do you take to ensure that the teams are involved in the decision making?

If there is a job they are on I will actually go out on site and we will talk through the job. The team leader or Supervisor might say "we will do it this way or we will do it that way". I would say how I would do it.

Do you have any formal meetings where they can put their ideas forward?

Yes we have team leader meetings but not every week. There is an in house magazine where they can raise ideas. But I feel there is something that involves the whole team I will get them together first thing of a morning or last thing at night to discuss issues with them. Or if it is just team leaders we will get them all together. They can relay the information down to the crews. Yes we try to keep them all in touch with most things

What freedom do you think you give the teams in changing the way the work is carried out?

If I think it will be beneficial to the organisation and it can get the job done then you we give the team leaders pretty much the freedom to do the work as they want to do it. There is no hard and fast rule to say you have got to do it this way. As long as it is safe they can undertake the work the way they want to do it. There is nothing really set in concrete to say well you have to do it this way.

How do you think that freedom impacts on the quality of the service?

I think it improves the service. It's like people can see that they are getting value for money. We are being watched everyday by Mr Public. There is value for money out there because they are doing the job. I always say to my staff that I don't need to go out and visit you every day. There are hundreds and hundreds of eyes watching you every day.

Do you think you are empowering your teams?

To a certain degree but they have got some freedom. They have got some scope but I would not say you have got to do it this way. They have got to come to me. It is the same as I have got to go to my line manager. They have got to make their own decisions out there and if there is a problem they will phone up.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

The teams out there need managed. They understand that they have got to be managed. The manager has got to look after the welfare so you have got to have a manager.

Is there anything you would like to see changed in the way you are managed that would improve performance?

It has changed because we only used to meet every month and now we meet every two weeks. I am kept informed now a lot more that I was in the past. Things are more open than they were four years ago. I think we are kept informed if there is anything of any urgency. E-mail is used as well without a doubt.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage your teams that would improve performance?

I think everybody could always do something a little bit better. I don't think everybody is perfect. I think I have got a good working relationship with the staff that I manage. The staff out there are strong enough to tell me if I am not doing something that I should be doing.

What would you say would be the main barriers to change in this Council?

Generally if we have got a good idea and there is a good working relationship with the members and Councillors. If you can get them on your side they will

push it and they will get it changed. But it is like anything. If it is a good idea you might not get to do it right away they might decide just to look at it. But generally yes good ideas they will look at. I don't think I have come across anything they had said no to or anything like that.

G3

What is your current position in the organisation?

I am a team leader.

How have you got to that position?

I have just worked my way up. I have worked here in this department for 19 years now. When this position came up I just applied and I got it.

Did you need any particular qualifications or experience to get this job?

At the time no.

What would you say are the key responsibilities of your post?

Looking after the crews, delegating the work and liaising between management.

Do you have any national or local standards that you are meant to work to?

No not really it is just basically how we have been shown over the years. Obviously standards have dropped slightly. I would say due to money and time not allowed on the job.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I would yes because if you ring up at any time for a general service then you will get an answer.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

Neither, just coasting along.

How would you describe the way in which you are managed?

Every morning just a quick chat to say where I am working sort of thing. Then I pass that down.

Have you always been managed like that?

Always been like that and in the summer you get a tick sheet.

How is work allocated to you?

At the moment it's like a project we are on a big site where the trees need cut back and pruning. Basically I know that is it throughout the site until I am finished but during the summer it is on a mowing schedule. A 14 day route sort of thing.

Do you think you get enough say in the way things are done?

I would say yes.

Do you feel any of your ideas are welcomed and tried out?

Yes.

Do you have any recent examples?

If I do say this is the way I would like things doing then I do get a positive response to how it is carried out.

Would you say the way in which you are managed could affect the quality of your work?

Yes it affects the quality of the work.

How much of your work is prescribed and how much do you feel you have influence over?

I couldn't change much. It is project work and I just have to finish it.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No.

It is sometimes defined as when your manager empowers you that is him letting you decide how to do the work. He would not be saying you have to do it a certain way. With that sort of definition would you say you are being empowered?

I would say so yes.

Do you think that style is applied only in your service area or throughout the whole Council?

I couldn't say because I have only ever worked in the same place.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out or do you prefer to have some say in the way it is carried out?

50/50 really. I do like a say in it.

Any particular reason?

Well like when you go on site they don't know everything that is there. You can relay it back and get a response to what you want to do.

Do you think that approach is effective for the team?

Yes as long as there is money there to support it.

How do you allocate work to your supervisors and operatives?

Basically when we get out of the van on a morning I tell them what they have to do.

Do you think it is your responsibility to decide how the work should be carried out?

Yes I would say so yes.

Do you do anything formally with your teams to ensure they are involved in the decision making?

On the job we do yes. They will say I want to do it this way and I will see. At the end of the day it is me who carries the can.

Do you feel you give them any freedom to change the way the work is carried out?

Yes as long as it is a safe way of doing it.

Do you think that affects the quality of the work?

Yes definitely.

Looking at the term empowerment we mentioned earlier would you say you empower your teams?

Yes to a degree yes.

What would you say is the main purpose of management?

Bringing in work I would say and pricing up the jobs.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve the performance?

No It's about right.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that would improve performance?

No not really.

If you wanted to change something in this Council what would you think may be a barrier to that change?

No nothing really.

Authority H Transcripts

H1

How have you got to this position?

I used to work for other Councils in this type of work. I now have 25 years experience.

Did you need any specific qualifications or experience to get the job?

I needed a minimum of 5 years experience and I have to be a chartered member of the institute.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post?

Day to day operation of refuse and recycling.

Do you have agreed standards that you have to work to?

We have themes that we operate to such as being a well run Council.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

Yes I do.

What makes you say that?

Because of the innovations, the training we have had with the men. The move now towards recycling aspirations.

Do you believe you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

I think we are certainly ambitious in terms of performance. We have been good performing but there is still room for improvement. There are certainly things that I see in this service that can antagonise me such as standard of work, quality of work, communications not so much with supervisory staff but getting your mind set with getting information and what you really require from the job at an operational manual level.

How would you describe the way your line manages you? In terms of style?

He leaves me very much to my own free expression. We all have a look at our service plans. We all have all areas of responsibility. We report back regularly on those, whether we are reaching our targets, whether we are on course to meet them and I think the whole of the set up. We certainly know which way

we are going in terms of what we intend and want to achieve in this financial year end even longer term.

Have you always been managed like that?

No – at one time when I first came here I had a manager who was very much the old school. And he was very dictatorial. He was very autocratic in his management style. He did not leave people to get on with things.

How is your work allocated to you?

It is allocated personally by long term and short term targets. My self and another operations co-ordinator make sure that the daily operation of work refuse collection and recycling carries on and is carried out to the standards and at the same time we both have other duties and responsibilities. Mine at the moment is looking after trade waste and expanding our recycling services to trade customers. Going in to schools and selling services to them etcetera. Getting all the anomalies out of the charging system to do with churches and residential homes.

Is the current system effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?

I think now we have more opportunity. We have gone through a fairly radical restructuring process. At one time there was myself and four inspectors. Morale was fairly low and it took its toll on everybody. Now we have got more people in the structure to do the job which relieves the pressure. People have more time to do the job so they can do a better job. They can make sure they get things right. It's a structure now where you fire fight less than what we used to.

Do you feel you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

Yes – everybody can have a free reign here. You are positively encouraged to come up with ideas and express them if you have something to say.

Can you give me any recent examples of that?

Long pause – selling recycling services to trade waste customers. Very much I have been left to write the business plan and just get on and do it the best way that I think. As long as it gets the consent and the okay off other people then yes.

Would you say that the way you are managed can have an impact on the quality of your work?

Hmm – yes – it must do.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have a client influence over?

Well we have always got the day to day operations to do so that takes up about four fifths of the week so it is probably an 80% 20% split.

Have you ever come across the word empowerment?

Yes

What does that mean to you?

Empowerment means that I am encouraged to go through a decision making process with support from higher management to achieve targets and goals.

From what you said earlier, do you feel you are empowered by your manager?

Yes I do.

Do you think that it is unique to your range of services or is it a strand that you would see throughout the authority?

I think it is more of a strand, I don't have an informed view of other waste services although we speak to each other a lot I don't delve into their structures and style of management too closely so I don't have an informed view on that. I can't make that comparison these days.

From your perspective would you prefer to have some say or do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you?

Oh no, I prefer to have some say. I think everyone can be innovative, everyone can have ideas and they should be aired in a proper forum whether you are given credit or otherwise.

What makes you feel like that from a personal perspective?

Well it makes you feel valued for one thing. If people take on board the opinions that you have if they are analysed and valued.

So would you say your manager empowers you?

Yes I would.

Would you say that is best for you and the team?

I think eventually best for everybody. There are some people that like to be led more certainly, but at the end of the day we are trying to put a team together with team leaders etcetera who will think for themselves, who will come up with good ideas who are accountable, who can operate with some autonomy.

Who do you allocate work to?

To the four first line supervisors, the trade waste officers, the waste minimisation officer, and the trade waste recycling assistant.

How do you allocate work to them?

We have meetings where we can plan the way forward quite clearly. I give them support when they need it. I regularly monitor them myself, if I think that they are up a learning curve as one or two of them are at the moment and they are working well, then I will give them their lead and let them carry on, but I will always be there as someone to seek advice from, and someone I can always give them my support if I think it is necessary. And I encourage them to come back to me. In any way if they feel that they are working outside their remit or they are taking on something where they might struggle.

Do you think you give your teams freedom in deciding the way the work is carried out?

Hmm as long as it is in line with general planned way forward then yes. We never want to stop people. Don't come to dull their enthusiasm and we don't want to limit them progressing ideas but sometimes they have to be tamed a little bit. There are political and financial constraints to be taken into account.

How do you make them aware then of the boundaries? You give them freedom but are you also saying there is a line?

Well I think our people now are fairly well trained up to consider the effects of their actions and what they do. And that is something that I will probably highlight and flag up. You know on a day to day basis whenever we are discussing things. To sort of gear them to look into the political and financial

aspects. I suppose bottom line is to say that we like to make them accountable for whatever they do. Accountability on their part. If they do something and it goes base over apex then you know.

Going back on the empowerment theme would you say you empower your teams?
Yes I do.

What leads you to say that?
Well it's my management style basically.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?
To achieve a goal as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Is there anything you would change in the way your work is managed that you feel would improve performance? The way your manager manages you?
Long pause – Maybe on occasions to get – well - we have appraisals here which we do twelve monthly and it is very hard operationally to get everybody sorted out for them. Perhaps more regular meetings just to know that they are happy with what I am doing. I suppose a bit of a reassurance thing at the end of the day.

Is there anything you would change yourself in the way you manage your teams that would improve performance? Or do you feel you have got it just about right?
No – I know my weaknesses as a manager, sometimes I need to delegate more and I don't. Not because I think I need to keep things it's just that I am a perfectionist and I want things to go right and sometimes I have difficulty leaving go of the reins and letting people have their lead but I do try.

If you had any real big ideas to change things would there be any barriers that would stop you doing that?
Only the usual barriers – I need to follow the political line. As you know yourself local authority management is probably the most frustrating going. If you are in a private firm you come up with a whole set of new ideas then people will either say they are very good or that they are no good at all. Here everything has got to fit in with the general overall theme and the way the Council is perceived and the way it wants to go.

H2

What is your position in the organisation?

I was classed as an Assistant Manager but now I am called a Team Leader.

Have you always worked for this Council?

I have worked here for the last 22 years now.

So this has been your main career in this type of service?

I have worked also in parks and open spaces for 17 years prior to this.

Did you need any specific training or experience to get this job?

I qualified on the man management side of it through the parks. I started off as a gardener and worked my way up to be a machine operator then a charge hand. I have worked my way up through the ranks. I then became a Technical Assistant then on to this job as Assistant Manager some five years ago.

What do you see as the main responsibilities of your post?

Man manager, motivation of the teams, organisation, identifying problems, and solving problems. Also management stuff that you would do on a day to day basis. Health and Safety as well.

Do you work to agreed standards or do you decide the standards to work to?

Long pause – obviously I work to the highest standards possible, but this Council works to its own targets. So I try to achieve those targets as much as possible.

Are these corporate targets made clear to you?

Yes, I suppose so, Yes.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service when it comes to Waste Services?

I think they are getting a very good standard at the moment. Obviously there is a big impact at the moment with the government pushing for reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. And we are trying to educate the lads to do our best to educate the public. You know to carry out their jobs to a very high standard and to give the public the standards they require really.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious local authority?
I think we are quite high performing at the moment. We are building up to it and achieving our goals at the moment. I am sure that in the future we are going to achieve better goals than we are getting now.

How would you describe the way you are currently managed?

If there is something that needs to be done he will pass it down to me. Then I will re-iterate it to the staff but he tends to leave us to get on with it and manage the lads. If there is any problem such as something we are not undertaking properly he will let us know about it and we will act on it or get trained up on it.

Have you always been managed like that?

Everyone manages differently and this is a totally different job to my last job. Just lately here, like when I first came across the managers here, lets say it wasn't structured very well, but since then there has been a restructure and it is working great now. But I was under a lot of pressure prior to that restructure from when I first came over. If you had asked me that question then I would have said no it is not managed the same. As when I was managed in the past they were very tight, they did the job in a professional manner and nothing was missed out really.

How is your work allocated to you by your manager?

Verbally and written really. It comes both ways.

Is that Okay? Do you think it is effective?

Yes – I have no issues with it at all.

Do you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

I will implement it definitely. If I think of a way I can do something better to improve the overall performance of the job then I will make that decision myself and move the job forward. I am happy that I have got the backing – yes – I suppose I have got the backing of management now in regards to doing the job and obviously if I want to improve performance or carry out the job in a more safe or practical way then they will let me get on with it.

Would your manager expect you to run it past him first or just do it?

I usually, it depends on how small or how big of a change I am making, but if it is only a minor change then they will just let me get on with it, but if I want to make some form of a big change, or the restructure of a round or something, then I will run it past him and we will obviously discuss it then project plan it and change it that way. We have also to get the unions and everyone involved.

Would you say they welcome new ideas and try them out?

Yes,

Do you have any recent examples?

Cardboard round, I thought of a cardboard round. I run it past them we project planned it. Talked it over round the table. Then we moved on from that. There is about two to three thousand moving onto it. The management and the bigger picture.

Would you say that the way you are managed could affect the performance of the team?

I feel that I am an open manager. I try to have an open door policy with the lads. In fact I have always said to the lads if I come down on them for any reason at all then I can put it behind me, and hopefully they can do the same, because you know if you are not managed right, I feel you will not get the performance from your staff.

How much of the work you do is prescribed and how much do you feel you have direct influence over?

Well I try to balance it out I suppose say 50/50. I feel he can leave me to get on with managing the staff and if there are any issues regarding the work he will obviously come and tell me about it as required.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Long pause – vaguely.

What does it mean to you?

To empower is giving out an instruction to somebody. I mean I have come across it on courses and stuff like that. Freedom to act I suppose.

From what you said earlier to you think you are empowered?

50% or so yes, but I would not overstep the mark on it.

Do you think that is unique to your service or is it the way this Council operates as a whole?

If you don't let somebody manage. If you can't let somebody manage then they should not be in the position they are in. You know that should go for all positions really. Unless they overstep the mark and start doing silly things like just employing people without going through agreed procedures. Say spending wise, if you just overspend. The budgets are set for who can spend so much.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out or do you prefer to have some say in the way your work is carried out?

I prefer to have some say and am allowed to manage. If you want a lapdog then employ a lapdog.

Why do you say that?

Well if you work for someone and say yes sir I will do whatever you say sir, then that's not letting you manage. That's not letting you get on with your job.

Would you say then that your line manager empowers you?

Yes – I see it that as a management structure we are a team and we should all work together as a team. We should be able to make decisions.

Do you think that is best for you and best for the performance of your team?

Yes.

Who do you allocate work to in your role?

I have about 55 staff at the moment.

Do you have working charge hands?

No – the drivers are classed as supervisors to the team that they work in, but only on a supervisory side to tell them where they are going or where they

start, but overall I virtually oversee everything along with a colleague that works alongside me.

How do you then get instructions down to them so that they know what they are meant to be doing?

Well the lads book on and off at the window on a morning. We can give out instructions there or we can talk to them or we can also do site visits with them. To make sure that the work is carried out we will do inspections. Team inspections to check the quality of the work.

Do you feel as a supervisor that it is your job to decide how the work is carried out?

Long pause – Yes – I mean from day one when I first started with 17 staff. I have always done it from day one to have all the lads working as a team. Whereas the refuse who have been here a long time, they don't do that. You can see the difference between the refuse and the recycling. My lads will work well together and they will assist each other when we are quiet. I have built that into the team. It works very well.

So do you feel the work is up to you and they just carry out your decisions?

Yes – followed by a pause.

Do you have any formal processes to ensure your teams are involved in the decision making process?

Yes we project plan it, we talk to unions, and we set up forums. When we last bought wagons we sent the lads out to see what they thought of them. We got all their input and I always try to involve the lads as much as possible.

What freedom do you feel you give the team in deciding how the work is carried out?

I try to listen as much as possible to what their thoughts are in regards to the job. At the end of the day they are the ones who do the job on a day to day basis. If they have got issues or problems I am hoping that they can come to me with them so that we can rectify them and move on. Obviously from safety wise and operational wise.

Do you think that impacts on the quality of the services?

I think it gives the lads – if you can keep the lads motivated then the quality of the service is carried out a lot better. It makes a big impact on how the job is actually carried out.

Looking back at the term empowerment would you say you empower your teams?

I think so. I like to think that they can ask me anything and that I can listen and take them on board and move forward with them if it is a practical way to improve the overall performance of the Council.

What do you see as the purpose of management?

The purpose of management is to get the job done to work to a good standard and to make sure that things don't collapse and fall apart. Obviously if you don't have some one to manage the job then there is nowhere for the individual to focus on. They need to focus on, to lean on someone to take them forward and to improve things.

Do you have any recent examples?

Yes the restructuring of the rounds and the teams I suppose. Changes to the way the collections are managed, obviously we have worked with them. It has been led and managed.

So have you utilised the skills of the teams in house?

Yes, obviously the managers should recognise the skills of the workforce and individual performance. That is good management and a good manager that can manage his teams. Obviously if you get the wrong type of team you have to be able to rectify and put things straight.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve the performance of the teams?

No at the moment I would say it is fine. If you asked me that question two years ago I would have said yes.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage your teams that would improve performance?

I am hoping that I am getting better. Over the years I have gained in experience to take two steps back now rather than one step forward when

compensating and obviously I am changing. I am a more approachable person.

What would be the barriers in this organisation to change?

The only barriers I see are through the Councillors Committees as they have the final say on issues as with the managed weekly collections, they made some decisions about putting them into different areas that operationally would turn into a bit of a nightmare. So yes there are those barriers there and obviously I would like them to listen a bit more.

H3

What is your current position within the Council?

I am a refuse collector/loader.

How have you got to where you are now?

I have been here for 18 years through privatisation. I was TUPE transferred to the Council when they got the contract back.

Did you need any specific qualifications or training for the work you do now?

No, but since I became a safety rep we have done more training such as manual handling, machine operation training. And we now have a worker/management forum. That is usually on a Thursday. We also do banks man awareness training and terburg lifter training and the management then come in and we have an open floor debate. It's quite good.

What do you see as being the key responsibilities of your post?

What for emptying bins? Well from a personal point of view to get finished, to get home. Long pause.

What do you see as the key standards you are working to?

The ethics are excellent but there is not enough management involvement. They just give us a set of keys and off you pop in the morning. If for any reason that you have to leave a bin or anything like that they are not interested. You get sent back for missed bins and other things like you are never defended when the public complains or anything. You should fully expect management backing and for them to believe you rather than believe the complaints.

Do you believe the public are getting a high standard of service?

No – they hate the bin men, always have done.

What makes you say that?

Well I have been battered once on the street. Well twice actually I have been hit. Mainly by the dregs of society you know. Well when I did get battered it went to court. So the Council set up a new policy. A lone worker policy. When I was attached I was in front of the vehicle so the Council had to produce a lone worker policy.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious authority?

Potentially yes. This management of fortnightly collections involving recycling is very ambitious. It seems to be kind of working but there are still lots of niggly bits. Our managers though don't seem to be learning from the last lot. They just keep rolling it out rolling it out and rolling it out. They just don't seem to care how the lads are feeling. They just keep bringing agency staff in and they are not competent.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

I am not really managed. I just get on to the bins. We are just left to our own devices. The only time we have any interaction with the managers is when there has been a complaint such as a bin been missed. We never get any praise, or a job well done or anything like that. You know we have gone from the times when we were finishing at half three to where we are working all day now. You know the rounds are getting bigger and there is more work.

Have you always been managed like this or have you been managed differently?

I have had a lot better managers but they had been here a long time. They are all new.

How is your work allocated to you?

Usually we get tickets if a round is changing but as a rule we would get a memo stating that there is an addition or a deletion at the best. It is usually though a week after it starts that we get to know about it.

Do you think that is an effective way of working or would you like more say in the way things are done?

I would like a lot more say.

Can I ask a question?

Of course.

Most of the lads on the rounds well they know what is changing on the rounds. Say for example if someone dies and it was an assisted lift at that house. Well the lads know that. Then we tell the management but they don't act and say no 'just forget it'. They don't listen to us or do something. It is the same with repairs to containers or wheelie bins. We report them and there is a crew that goes round to repair them. They are 'just dragging these bins and containers round'. So they get broken and they don't get repaired. When you have reported them four times and nothing happens then what can you do? The next step is for us to just leave the container but then you just get sent back.

So is there any opportunity for you to put ideas and suggestions forward to improve the service?

Well there are the worker management forums but unfortunately they are for full time staff only. And the way it is working you only get to go on one then you have to wait till it's your turn to go on the next time. I would prefer team briefings but again its priorities. They just want you out of the yard at quarter past seven. It's this task and finish. If it was scrapped life would be a lot easier.

Do you think any of your suggestions would be welcomed and that they would try them out?

No not really. That happens all the time. Take for example health and safety; we have stopped wagons going over uneven ground. We had to get the vehicle towed out but there is a Councillor on that street. So we got told to go back again. Until someone hurts themselves, nothing will get changed. And it is too late then unfortunately. They are more reactive than proactive.

How would you say the way you are managed affects the quality of your work?

Nine times out of ten you are happy just to go out and get the round done.

Basically that is how everybody feels with task and finish. But if something is

not going right and you are dragged into the office then you just don't feel like doing it.

How much of your work is prescribed and how much do you feel you have some influence over?

We have a route as such but how you do it is down to you on the day. You have to change if there has been a crash and you can't get down the road and things like that. Like when schools close. You just change the round to fit round the circumstances.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

No but I know what it means.

What does it mean to you? How would you define it?

It means that you have got the capabilities to make decisions.

From what you have said earlier, do you feel you are empowered?

Not particularly no. We have rules and regulations that we have to abide by and you do try to follow them but the unfortunate thing is you follow them to the letter then you upset the public. You know you are not supposed to take extras but we do. If you don't take them, if you leave them they get upset. They will phone up and you will get sent back. You don't get any back up. So it is easier just to take it. As long as it is not a three-piece suite or a bathroom suite.

Do you think that is a unique style to Waste Services or is it like that throughout the Council?

It is just strategic.

Would you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or would you prefer to have a say in how it is to be carried out?

I would like to have some say.

Why do you say that? What would be the benefits?

Because your point of view can be put across. Someone that does the job day to day. They know the ins and outs of it. So they know the difficulties. Nine times out of ten they will know the solutions to put into place.

Would you say your line manager empowers you?

Not really no – If you raise your head above water you are just going to get into trouble so it is not worth it.

What brings you to that conclusion?

Well I am a union rep and I have to defend lads who are being disciplined for trivial things. Things that should get sorted by a chat through the window. It is diabolical over silly things. If there was only empowerment and management did back us up then there would be a lot less disciplinaries.

So, if you did have more say do you think they would reduce?

Yes definitely yes.

From the performance of the team by not having the chance to have your say would you say that affects the performance of the team?

It can do. Yes definitely it can do. I mean you have to work at a certain pace to get finished and you have a pretty good idea when you are going to get finished. If something happens that interferes with that process and you know it is going to be a late finish then you slow it down.

Do you allocate work to anybody in your role?

No. I used to but not now.

Is there anything you could change in the way you are managed? That would improve the performance of the team?

Definitely to have more management involvement. More supervision. A little bit of faith in the workforce. Instead of taking sides all the time.

If you feel that is the way forward then what do you see as the barriers to stopping it happening?

Well ignorance and arrogance within there. There is definitely a bin mans culture not only here but throughout the country. Generally the bin men are uneducated and they come here feeling they are doing a manly job so it is very masculine orientated. A lot of the younger ones have a tendency not to wear their PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). The gloves for example they don't feel macho enough if they are wearing them. Until something happens like on a round they get hit by a car and then they will start wearing it. But

because there are two standards with the lack of education and the macho image which it portrays – You know doing such a hard physical job. They feel proud that they are in that role. They also feel stigmatised you know if they see their friends in the street. It is really an awkward position.

From the management perspective do you think if they had a more open style to make decisions. Do you think they don't want you to work that way that they perhaps want to dictate the way things are done?

They definitely want to dictate how it is done. They have their own agenda and they can see where they have been told where to go. All they want to do is get the rounds out as soon as possible by any means. It doesn't matter how or whether they break the law. The drivers break the law ten times a day. Using the mobile phones whilst at the wheel. They go driving down bus lanes well they are not supposed to drive down bus lanes. To keep the rounds doing all the time. Until they are caught then when they are caught there is a disciplinary.

Authority J Transcripts

J1

What is your position in the organisation?

I am the street services manager. I look after street cleaning, environmental maintenance and fleet transport. I have worked here for the last 6 years. I came here from the private sector. The Council had just re-organised and I applied for this post and got the job because of my operational background in the private sector. I saw the job as a challenge.

Did you require any specific qualifications or experience in order to get the job?

No qualifications but mainly experience. They were very tough at interview.

What would you say are your key responsibilities?

It's making sure we are in a position to meet the needs of the residents in terms of street scene provision. That includes grounds maintenance. It is actually making sure that the service plan which sets our performance management framework and structure is delivered.

Are you working to any local or national standards?

Obviously with regard to street cleanliness we report under NI 195. We have a stretch target at the moment to 8%. National standards we don't work to any at the moment but we are working towards ISO 1401.

Would you say the public are getting a high standard of service?

In our service I would say they are getting a medium to high service.

What makes you say that?

I think we are quite fortunate. With the resources we have they are well laid out by the Supervisors and the operatives. To be quite honest I think we have got quite a positive team. It is difficult sometimes people get a bit down as we all do but we have benchmarked ourselves against similar Councils and by far we are the most under resourced. But we are up there with regard to performance so we are value for money I would say in regards to this service.

Do you think you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

I think we are working for a coasting authority to be honest up until last year. And there seems to be a bit of a renaissance in the last year, not just in this service but in the authority as a whole. It is being driven by the senior management team with plans and succession planning etc. They are putting a lot more emphasis into customer service. Customer facing staff training.

How would you describe the way in which you are managed?

Long pause – I can't put a word on it but to keep it simple it is quite open to be honest really. It's not autocratic. It's quite open if anything I would probably like a bit more formal direction to be quite honest. I think we all do when sometimes you need to be kept on track and pointing in the right direction.

Have you always been managed in that way? Was it different in the private sector?

Yes it is different in the private sector.

Which style do you prefer?

I would say a mixture between both actually. The head of service before the one we have got now was very, very autocratic. We have talked about this a lot here at management level. There was no middle ground. My current line manager is very laid back. Manages to think things over a bit too much and probably needs to be a bit more direct.

How is your work allocated to you?

I am expected to manage my own workload. There is a formal process of regular weekly meetings with the managers and our head of service. There are performance appraisals and one to ones on a twice a month basis.

Is that effective or would you like to have more say in the way things are done?

I think they are quite effective actually yes. I think we get a lot of say.

Would you say that you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

Yes.

Are your ideas welcomed and tried out?

I think it is where they stop. They seem to be well received. I think more so in the past than it is now they would stop at a senior level. They would never get above that.

Do you have any recent examples?

Yes quite a few actually. One was looking at the structure and putting in place possibly a business development manager but putting in place one of the existing roles. There is a lot of emphasis now on efficiency savings with what is happening with the local economy and so on. The local authority is in a difficult position financially. There are some difficult decisions to be made so I was trying to push for some efficiency to be made within the service. We could do it ourselves but it needed pulling together. We are driven by our local partnerships at the moment.

Would you say the way in which you are managed could affect the quality of your work?

Very much so.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have some influence over?

Influence to change I would say 80%.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it?

Giving people the authority, the power the confidence, the backing, the support to go forward and try their own ideas and strike out on their own and take control of themselves.

From what you have said earlier do you feel you are empowered?

To an extent.

Do you think that is unique to your service area or is that the way it works throughout this Council?

I think the Council is changing to transfer the power to a lot of people to be honest.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out or do you prefer to have some say in the way it is carried out?

I prefer to have some say but I think there needs to be a clear direction.

Would you say that your line manager empowers you?

To an extent.

What brings you to that conclusion?

I think he tends to it sounds like I am whinging here. I tend to be put on to be quite honest which doesn't allow you to be empowered. I am looking after four sections at the moment and there are other managers on the same level who are just looking after one. And I can say I want to do this and I can't do this and just because you are willing you to tend to get put on.

Do you think a style of empowerment is good for you and the team?

Good for everyone yes.

Who do you allocate work to?

To my managers in the street services. But I do also have a link with the operational team managers.

How do you pass your instructions down?

Various ways really. Starting from the start there is an annual service plan where the objectives are clearly defined there. Out of that come individual action plans and programmes. We have monthly meetings on a regular basis. And we also have one to one performance management meeting. Every two months and on a day to day basis. It will either be word of mouth, in person or e-mail etc. A lot of work nowadays seems to be passed by e-mail to be honest.

Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out?

Yes to an extent and it is not necessarily how I want to be. But it is sometimes just how it is. There has been a culture in the past of people

looking up for that sort of direction. People not acting up to the jobs and pushing it back up on to you.

What steps do you take to ensure your teams are involved in the decision making?

We have an open team meeting agenda. That is placed on the central computer drive and anyone can put on any items they want on the agenda.

What freedom do you think you give your teams in changing how the work is carried out? A lot of freedom or freedom providing they okay it with you first?

I think it depends on what level to be quite honest. More so of late we want it to go through well at least touching base with me. Because of the way it has operated in the past. It has been run as four different sections with four different managers and everyone has been doing things a different way. We have got a new transformation programme that we have just put in and we are trying to get everyone sort of not doing everything the same but sort of rationalising what we are doing.

How do you feel that impacts on the quality of the service?

I think it is favourable to be quite honest. I think the reason that is; the main thing is we are not changing things every two minutes.

So would you say you empower your teams or at least do your best to empower your teams?

I would say I do empower them.

What makes you say that?

I give them quite a lot of autonomy. Individual projects. If they come up with ideas and things like that. I don't try to do everything myself I do pass it to them and I do encourage to think for themselves and come up with solutions and ideas.

What would you say is the main purpose of management?

I think it is to create an environment where people can carry out their jobs properly.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve the performance of the team?

Yes I think if I had more specific guidance on performance frameworks. I think if you don't have them in place and they are not clear and they are not managed on a regular basis and they get put back you get to crisis management. I just think it is important that performance management meetings are done properly.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage your teams that would improve performance?

Yes I think it is providing the clear direction for my staff to be quite honest. Letting them know what is expected of them.

What would you say would be the biggest barriers to change in this Council?

Politics and funding really. We are always trying to do things on a shoestring.

J2

What is your position in the organisation?

I am a street services team manager.

How long have you worked for this Council?

I have worked for this Council of 32 years.

So how have you got to where you are now?

I started as a trainee gardener at 16 and went through my training. When I was 18 I worked outside on what was called rechargeable work. Then I applied for a charge hand position and got that job. I did that for ten years. Then I applied for the team leader post at the cemeteries and was successful there. Whether it was something to do with me or not but the manager there left four months after I started and I ended up getting his job. With the reorganisation and environmental management coming into being this job came available I put in for it and was successful.

Did you need any specific qualifications or experience to get this job?

Rather than qualifications you need a good grounding of both experience and knowledge. You need to know what's what and how to deal with things. My background is in gardening but now I also look after other environmental work like street cleaning. But you pick it up. You just learn it.

What would you say are the key responsibilities for your post?

Making sure the streets of the City are kept clean. Making sure the performance indicators reach the stretch targets. And latterly it has been reaching the green flag status in the parks. We have to reach six by 2010.

Do you work to any agreed national or local indicators?

Yes NI 195 & NI 196.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I think they get a decent standard of service. Whether or not they are satisfied with that service I don't know. The satisfaction survey has increased our satisfaction levels but I think the more you give them the more they expect. What they used to complain about when I first got this job has now been erased and they now complain about small things. But I think they get a good standard of service yes.

Would you say you are working for a high performing and ambitious Council?

Yes I think they are. We have got some people who are pushing us towards that. Yes I think we are. We are high performing.

How would you describe the way you are managed? What sort of style?

Very long pause – my line manager. I don't know how to put this for the best. He is not that good my line manager. But his line manager is absolutely fantastic. He knows how to manage but my immediate line manager is not that good to be honest.

In what way?

He is out of his depth.

Does he tend to control you or is his style too loose?

He tries to manage from the book. But you can't. In my opinion you can't manage from a book. Like this is how it is laid out. You have got to well there are about 100 operatives with issues. There are 100 separate egos. You can't manage that from a book. He has no experience. He is probably good in a small section but we have a helluva lot going on here. A lot going on and he is just out of his depth. I am sorry to say it. He doesn't give you any support so you feel you are doing it on your own. If I have a problem I bypass him and

go to his line manager. At least then I get consensus. I may not like the answers but at least I get answers. From day one I knew he was not right for the job. He does not have what it takes.

How is your work allocated to you?

I self manage myself. I do my own work plans. If he needs me to do anything he will just e-mail me or put it on my desk.

Is that effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?

It's fine because I am as I say my own boss. I know it sounds awful but I blank him out to be honest. I get more done by running it the way I need to run it.

Do you get the chance to put forward any new ideas?

Yes. We are always encouraged to come up with new stuff.

Do you have any recent examples?

Yes. We brought in ward based sweeping. We used to use crews in areas. But now we use conspicuous presence which means he has his own area and gets to know people. It was trialled before Christmas and it was successful. It happened but then we took the trial away and as far as I am concerned the standards have gone a long way down. I made sure they saw that from the BVPI's. So now they are in the process of putting it back together again.

Would you say that the way in which you are managed could affect the quality of the work?

No not really because I don't let it. If he comes up with something that I think is wrong I will just say you can't do that.

How much of your work is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over?

I would say about 25% of it is prescribed. It is what I have to do everyday. But the rest of the time is dealing with complaints doing estimates and things like that.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does it mean to you? How would you define it?

Having ownership and taking responsibility for your decisions. For your areas and for your actions basically.

From what you have said earlier do you think you are empowered?

I think I am empowered in a way yes but it is not as it should be. It is my empowerment that I do.

Do you think that is unique to your service area or is that how it works right through this Council?

I think this is unique to my situation. There are good managers here but unfortunately I haven't got one.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out or would you prefer to have some say in the way it is carried out?

No. I would never like it to be spelled out.

Why not?

Because part of the job I enjoy is the differences and the diversity it throws at you. If it was all prescribed for me then I wouldn't have been here that long.

Would you say an open style is good for you and good for the team?

I think it is good for me and the team know that if they have problems then me and the supervisors will listen to them. And do our best for them I think it works.

In your role who do you allocate work to?

I allocate work to supervisors and park wardens. I expect them to allocate work to their front line.

How do you actually allocate the work? How do you pass the instructions down?

Usually e-mails or phone or in personal verbally.

Do you feel it is your responsibility to decide how the work is carried out?

No I think the way a job is carried out is down to the supervisors and the lads who are doing it. Because they are front line staff and they know what they

are doing . If I want something done a particular way though I will tell them this is how I want it done.

Do you take steps to ensure your teams are involved in the decision making process?

Yes I have team briefs where they are allowed to come up with suggestions. What we are about to start which refers back to the other questions is having regular charge hand meetings. I have supervisor meetings but I don't have charge hand meetings. And I want the charge hands now to take a bit more ownership in what is happening. So I am going to be implementing that. Its one thing my manager and I agree on to be honest.

What freedom do you think you give your teams to change the way things are done?

If they come up with an idea they are welcome to put it forward and it will be discussed. It won't be dismissed out of hand. It will be discussed and if it is a good idea then it will be trialled. I would never put anything in place straight off that has not been trialled first. I have been bitten once too often. They are always welcome to put suggestions though. We have a suggestion box anyway that they can actually use.

Do you think that approach could affect the quality of the service?

No because it would be monitored and if it wasn't working. You know if something is going to work. We wouldn't let it. You know if something is going to work in the first week or a fortnight so before it got out of hand it would be reigned in. We would say forget that one.

So would you say you empower your teams?

Yes I think so. I am not a dictatorial manager that says you will do it this way. If it is going right great. If there are problems came and see me.

How would you describe the purpose of management?

To ensure that the work is done. Ensure that it is done efficiently and cost effectively. Ensure that the standards and procedures are followed and make sure that if you can, that there is a good atmosphere in the workforce. And knocking any problems on the head before they become major.

Is there anything you would change in the way you are managed that would improve the performance?

Yes a new manager basically. Sounds awful that.

How would your manager need to change?

He has no man management skills. He has no redeeming qualities whatsoever. In fact there isn't a single person in this building that likes him. He is just hated. I keep asking myself at night what the hell did I do to deserve this?

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that would improve performance?

I am always learning. Probably not to lose my temper as quickly. I have got a short fuse when things are going wrong but we do have a lot of pressure at the moment. I don't really know. That's an awful question. I would like the supervisors to take more responsibility which would free me up to do the planned things financial things as well.

Do you think they would welcome it if you did that?

No I have tried it. One of them will. They will do just what is expected. They are not forward thinking enough. That is what I want to encourage. I have tried doing it on numerous occasions but they see that as my job. I have got one supervisor who is frightened of making a decision. Stuff that he should be dealing with on a daily basis he comes to me with. I think I need to step back a little bit.

What barriers to change would there be in this Council?

Councillors and budgets. To be honest this Council has been brilliant for me. It has given me a good life and an education. I am very loyal to it.

J3

What is your position in the Council?

I am a street services team leader. I look after grounds maintenance, street sweeping, Bowling Greens and Parks.

Have you worked for this Council for long?

Yes I have worked for this Council for 29 years. I started here as a bin man.

So how did you end up doing this job from being a bin man?

I went from bin man to a driver loader then when wheeled bins were brought in I went onto that work. Then I was seconded to the client side to help implement wheelie bins across the Borough. Then I applied for a street cleaning management job. I went to night school then did a supervisory management course in Business and Finance. Then I became assistant Street Cleansing Manager. Then it just developed and when they amalgamated grounds and streets I got this job.

What would you say are your key responsibilities?

To supervise the teams. Also management and looking after agency staff. Oh and budget monitoring.

Do you work to any National or locally agreed Standards or indicators?

We do NI 195.

Do you think the public are getting a high standard of service?

I would say medium.

What makes you say that?

I don't think there are enough resources or men on the ground. A good example of that was when money was available for environmental work they put around £2m extra into the service. It made a phenomenal difference but they then robbed teams off us and put them onto recycling so the standards have dropped since then.

How would you describe the way you are managed?

I would say he was fair. He is keen and he will back you up. Very good actually.

Would you say you have always been managed like that?

I have had autocratic and democratic manager. I have had both types.

How is your work allocated to you?

Through experience really. How you know it runs. Everybody knows what they have to do really. There is an annual and seasonal programme of work that we do every year.

Is anything in place to ensure you are involved in the bigger picture? So you can put your ideas forward?

I would say we do get the chance yes. Yes both formally and informally. We have a suggestion box. With our managers it is an open door policy. The ideas usually get kaiboshed mind!

So are new ideas welcomed and tried out generally?

I would say no. Not like they used to be no.

Do you have any recent examples where they have said no or said yes?

No not really.

Would you say the way in which you are managed could affect the quality of the work?

I suppose it would have an impact but not as big an impact as you would think. I suppose everybody has an impact. The main group that do the supervision are the guys who know how to do it and what to do it with. It all helps though.

How much of your work would you say is prescribed and how much would you say you have influence over?

I would say 50/50 really.

Have you every come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

How would you define it?

On an enforcement side you can empower can't you. I would say it is them giving me the responsibility to make a decision and go and do it. To be honest you don't get that here.

So are you saying you are not empowered to any great degree?

I would say that they like to think we are but when it comes down to it we aren't.

Do you think that is unique to your service area or is that the way it is throughout the Council?

I think it has changed. I would say in the last seven to nine years it has changed. When we were just street cleansing we had a lot of empowerment. When we got the manufacturers in for sweepers we did the test. The blokes got the chance to give their feedback. There was a lot more input from the shop floor and involvement right up to the management but I would say over the last seven to nine years that has gone. I don't think there is any of that now.

Do you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or do you prefer to have some say in the way it is carried out?

I would rather have some say. I think best method doesn't work.

Who do you allocate work to?

I don't really because everybody knows what they are doing. So I don't really delegate a lot.

How do you pass instructions down?

I think they already know. The Supervisors are good and generally know what they have to do anyway.

Do you feel it is your responsibility to decide how the work should be carried out?

You mean on the ground?

Yes.

No.

What steps do you take to ensure your staff are involved in the decision making?

We are about to start charge hand meetings. They will be once a month. We have team briefings but they were a one way thing. But we do now say is there anything you want to bring up. Are there any problems?

So would you say you give your teams some freedom to change the way the work is carried out?

Yes I would say a lot.

So from your prospective would you say you empower your teams?

Yes I would yes. I mean if someone comes up and says “I want to change it” then they will run it through me and I will say right. I mean me personally I would say I don’t care how you do it as long as it gets done. As long as it is efficient and value for money and no-one is taking the piss.

Would you expect them to check it over with your first?

Yes.

What would you say is the main purpose of management?

Well really to manage the workforce efficiently and effectively within the laid down policies and procedures and giving value for money really. As a tax payer that is what you want really.

Looking at your line manager. Is there anything you would change in the way he managed you that would improve performance?

Yes. To take a step back really and let us manage. My manager is really really good because he has come through the ranks. When you are an operational manager it is hard to let go. You know we will find that we he will interfere really. He will do it which makes you a bit lethargic you know. You will say well you just do it. Unless you are a forceful type of person to tell him to butt out.

Is there anything that you would change in the way you manage your teams that would improve performance?

I think I have it right but what I think what lets us down is the backup from senior management. Like disciplinaries and that sort of thing you don’t get the backing which lets you down really.

What would you say would be the main barriers to change things in this Council?

Finance. Finance and Bureaucracy and politicians. They tend not to follow procedures. They tend to just pick up the phone and think they can just get what they want. But it’s not like that.

Authority K Transcripts

K1

What is your position in the Authority?

My title is Waste Services Manager and I have the responsibility for refuse collection, recycling, street cleaning and some building cleaning, public toilets. I have the budget and staffing that goes with that.

How have you got to where you are now?

Working my way through the organisation. I started off as a clerical assistant in the old cleansing section back in 1989 and basically worked my way through a number of positions to where I am now.

Have you always worked in this industry?

On and off say consistently since 1992 so that is coming up fifteen years. I think I have been fortunate in that I got into this and then gained a qualification; you know I think from now on nobody would be able to do that. Things have changed while I've been doing it. I did an HNC in Waste Management in my previous job which put me in good stead for this one and I've done a Post Graduate Diploma in Management Studies in the early years of doing this job that I'm in now and I've also got a CPC for transport management. I act as the Council's Transport Manager.

What do you see as the Key responsibilities of your post?

That's a hard question. I think these days it's less about managing the operation and more about planning for the future, short and medium term.

What do you see as the Key standards of your organisation?

They constantly seem to be looking forward rather than dealing with the day to day stuff, although I do deal with the personnel issues and customer complaints, things like that.

Are you working for a high performing and ambitious Authority?

I think externally all the vibes are they want to be an excellent authority but I think most of us would be happy with being a good one. I think the last time we were assessed we were fair and I think that's to do with we are just a small authority, we are constantly under-resourced and you only do what you can.

Do you believe the public feel they are getting a high standard of service?

No.

What makes you say that?

I don't think the public will ever think that. I think they think they own us don't they. Council Tax has got a lot to answer for. They know they get a sheet every year which says you're paying for this, this and this. I suppose it has made us more accountable but nothing is ever good enough.

Describe the way in which you are managed. What style of management?

I'm left to get on with things basically on my own. I only go to my Line Manager when I'm struggling with something or I'm not sure what direction to take.

Have you always been managed like this?

I've worked here for 9 years now, so it was the biggest chunk. Yes, I think it's down to me and I haven't felt motivation. I've always more or less got on with things.

How is work allocated to you?

I plan my own workload plus a lot of it is driven by the events of the day, whatever happens.

Is that effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?

There are things that have got to be done all the time; Things like best value performance indicators, you know that they have got to be done; I suppose there is a timescale on those. It's something we're working to all year round. Then things like service plans, you're given timescales but they are not saying tomorrow you've got to do this, this and this, but I suppose things come in. You are given a period to do but you're not supposed to be dictated when you have to do it.

Do you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

Yes, definitely. I think his management style is management by walking about so you are constantly in communication with him even if it's just general chit chat. I suppose he encourages me, he's one of those managers that

encourages everybody's development and you never feel scared to suggest things.

Are suggestions welcomed and tried out?

Mostly yes.

Give me some examples?

I'm struggling to think of any, being put on the spot like that. I'm sure I can think of something.

Would you say the way you are managed affects the quality of your work?

I think it's hard for me to answer that having worked for the same manager for nine years; it's difficult to have any sort of benchmark. I would say probably worse because I'm comfortable with the way we work now. I have often wondered whether if he went to work somewhere else whether I would be comfortable continuing to do the job that I'm doing now with a different manager. Until you do something you don't know do you?

How much of your work is prescribed and how much do you have influence over?

I think most of it is prescribed, it timing when you choose to do things and the degree it is left down to individuals. I would like to think that I have an influence on most of it. I think most of what I do isn't really driven by somebody standing behind me saying you must do this but I know that certain things have got to be done within a timescale. It's hard to say.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Yes.

What does it mean to you?

I would say it's been given the authority and freedom to make decisions or to act on your own judgement.

From what you have said earlier do you feel empowered?

Yes, I think largely yes.

Do you feel that is the same throughout the Authority or unique to your team?

It's hard to say because you don't, I think we are a bit isolated because we are away from the main Council Offices but from what I can gather from talking to others I think it's more prevalent in the department in which I work than it is elsewhere.

Would you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or have some say in how it is carried out?

No, I'm happy to have some say in it, I think that's part of the attraction of the job. I like to have my own freedom; I would hate to be given a task list for the day and told here's what to do.

Would you say your line manager empowers you?

Yes. I think it's a whole range of things. Quite often he delegates things that he would maybe do otherwise, but it isn't delegating to get rid of things it's more about allowing me to develop as a manager, so sometimes I can get the credit for things that he should have done.

Is this best for you and best for the team?

Yes, best for me. Best for the team – I don't know. Maybe it is now. I would say the degree of empowerment that I've got now is more than what I had when I started out and I think it comes with experience and he's given me more and more as I've developed and become able to do more things.

Who do you allocate work to?

Three supervisors and three waste management officers and I've got an externally funded post that I give work to. Some work is given to the admin team who don't report directly to me but who work for the department.

How are your instructions passed down to your staff?

A lot of what they do is routine stuff particularly for the supervisors; you know getting the crews out on a morning, timesheets done and things like that is routine stuff. Other things we communicate by e-mail or by phone, we have a team meeting every other week and there are actions from that given to members of the team. I would like to think that I treat them in the way that my line manager treats me.

Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out?
Ultimately, but again I don't stand over their shoulders and say you've got to do this today. I would say probably 70% of their work they are doing regularly and throughout the day I might pick up the phone or pop downstairs to see them or give them things to do that way.

What steps do you take to ensure your team is involved in decision making?
We try to do an awful lot as a team and if we're doing particular projects or things we'll make sure that we regularly meet, and although I would normally chair the meeting I think I do everything I can to encourage input and them to disagree with me if they want to and come up with different ways of doing things. I think they are pretty good. Most of them they are always coming up with ideas which they run by me and say is it alright if we do this, or sometimes after the event they'll say I've done this, was it ok.

Would you say that you empower your team?
I do yes. I would hope so yes. The fact that I think I've got a fairly well motivated team and they do come up with ideas, they do suggest new ways of doing things. We're constantly discussing progress and how we could change things, we never stand still, and we're always looking at what we can do next.

What do you see as the purpose of management?
Management of a team is to guide the team to ensure the job gets done, guide and support. I suppose its being there when they're unsure and answering questions and being able to give some clear answers and confirm what they're doing is right.

Is there anything you would change in the way you and your work is managed that you feel would improve performance?
Having more people. Yes, I think for us its location. I've got part of the team three or four hundred yards away from me and the other three in a separate office downstairs and me up here. I think we're all too dispersed. I hope that our style would stay the same. Being in the same office as them might hinder them. I don't know whether they talk about me behind my back or not but they wouldn't be able to grumble about what I'd given them or anything.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that you feel would improve performance?

I think I would have to say no. I try to do the best I can.

What are the barriers to change then if you feel that way?

Well it's not easy for anybody to change his or her behaviour quickly is it so I think time is a barrier? Certain individuals, I know now we have gone through a period of change over the last four years and there is one particular person in the team who is still trying to catch up. I think given enough time any change can be made, it's how quickly it needs to be done.

K2

What is your position in the organisation?

I am waste services supervisor, one of three.

What does your work cover?

We cover the whole sector really from street cleansing to refuse cleansing.

We do cleaning of the toilets that type of thing, fly tips.

We also now have kerbside collections as well on our team so roughly in total approximately 70 people due to seasonal work as well.

What is your background? How have you got to where you are today?

I have worked in the waste industry now for between 25 and 27 years. I am an HGV driver by trade and how it came about was I used to work for the long distance company but I was tired of working away from home so there was a company up the road that I worked for. Many years ago they used to be just a small family run business so I actually worked for them for 15/16 years as a driver doing various tasks from your normal skips, your normal household waste, garage clearance to eventually a few years down the line I got into hazardous waste and liquid waste so I started doing that for them as well and driving arctic's all over the place. The biggest contractor at that particular time took the work off them. They lost that contract. One of the directors and a salesman asked me to join them which was quite a big decision as I had been with the other company for many years as a driver. So I did that and was with them roughly for a year when they promoted me to supervisor. I've always been interested in transport and vehicles; it's been a kiddie thing for me. So they put me through my CPC – that is Certificate of Professional

Competence, so I was their transport manager plus operational supervisor or manager. Down there it's a strange place to work; I don't know now if you've ever been down there. I was there roughly five or six years, and then I actually saw this post advertised. I had become a little bit tired working down there, I enjoyed the role I just wanted something different. The travelling ruined it to be honest travelling to here you could be there in 10 minutes, you could be there in 40 minutes. So I saw this post and it was my job description to a tee so I thought I'll try it and was fortunate enough to get the job. I've been here 19 months now.

Did you need any formal qualifications or training to get this job?

I suppose paper or certificate wise probably experience is the most that you need. When I actually applied for the post I put all the certificates in i.e. with being at my last company they are very safety conscious. I had done a lot of safety courses, a lot of IOSH Safety courses, I was a safety rep down there and I had my certificate from my haulage. I could actually be the transport manager here because I had all the qualifications. I think that is what swung it for me to get the post because I had quite a few qualifications or experience that we could adapt here or that weren't here at that particular time or that I feel weren't here at that particular time. Since I have started I feel as though we have moved on quite a lot. This Council introduced a thing called a toolbox talk, I don't know if you've ever heard of it. We have introduced that here now, not on a regular basis because it is difficult to speak to the crews especially on the refuse because they don't all start and finish here, only the driver really to be sure of seeing someone so to do the toolbox talks we tend to go out and meet them on the road and it is quite difficult to do that because the operational side of things we don't know what's going to happen that day. The training has improved, we do a lot of training now and I think general safety awareness has improved.

What do you see as the key responsibilities of your post?

Obviously I feel I'm responsible for the day to day operational side on the refuse more so than the cleansing, but one of the other supervisors unfortunately was ill for a little while and I stepped in on his department on the cleansing side so the lads on the cleansing associate me as their supervisor too. So I do tend to overlook all departments to be truthful. The refuse certainly, the kerbside collections certainly, they see me as their

supervisor and to be fair I would think the majority of the cleansing staff. I also feel I'm responsible for the health and safety because I am a safety rep here and all the lads know that, all the staff know that I'm the health and safety rep so if they have any concerns they will come to me.

What do you see as the key standards of your organisation?

Professionalism. We need, the organisation the borough is changing the way people work, changing the outlook that people have through people like myself and the other supervisors.

Do you believe the public feel they are getting a high standard of service?

I've never worked for an authority before I've always worked in the private sector and my personal opinion is you're easily shot down. I think the public myself included many years ago were easy people to condemn and have a pop at but I think me personally I think we do an excellent job.

What makes you say that?

Well when I came in I didn't realise how many properties the lads went to for collecting bins and such like, I didn't realise how many litter bins the lads emptied, didn't realise how many streets they swept on a regular basis. I feel that they do a lot of work in that day.

Are you working for a high performing and ambitious Authority?

I do yeah, especially with the group of people that they have now, that's my opinion. I think with comparing to the Supervisors and managers that are not here now and with the waste officers and the supervisors I think it's coming down and some parts are going up, its a two way thing we are not just learning off them, they're learning off us too and I feel that things are improving.

Describe the style of your line manager. How are you managed?

To be perfectly honest we don't really see a great deal of my line manager because although I have been here 19 months my role has changed quite a lot from what it was when I first started so my line managers has as well, so we don't see that much of each other. We try to have meetings on a regular basis, we tend to have two to three a month of general standard meetings of what's happening what's going on but obviously if something really goes pear

shaped we have the emails and the phones etc, you know we are in contact but we don't see her every single day.

Have you always been managed like this?

When you worked in the private sector although you were a contractor you had to work under strict rules and it's like the bible so if I went to the toilet and you were my manager you would know where I was at. It was really really tight. That was one thing I found strange when I came here, it was the freedom that people had here but obviously that was a building site you had to know where people were. When I worked there you were given your jobs for the day on an A4 sheet and you carried on with them jobs and you carried on until they were complete. If you had a problem you had a two way radio you contacted base and say I've got a problem I cant deal with this that and the other and it was dealt with that way.

How is your work allocated to you?

If there is something comes up out of the ordinary it's through a meeting or a one-to-one or an email. If there's something that's cropped up through the day that needs addressed right away, they will contact us virtually as soon as it happens and we will investigate whatever it is and correct whatever it is. The day to day running is quite repetitive so we know what we are doing day to day we have our normal duties that we do from day to day so we know what's coming up, we work off a diary system as well.

Is that effective or would you like more say in the way things are done?

I would like a little bit more say on the transport side of things because really that's my forte. The one thing that I have to remember – me personally is that I am a supervisor not a manager so I have to remember that although in the past I run the vehicles but I don't so much here but I do have a little bit of an input because I have the same qualifications as my Supervisors and Liner Manager.

Do you get the opportunity to put ideas forward?

On the whole yes, if it's the day to day running of things, if we have an idea or it's the operational side of things we go ahead to do it, we have the backing to do it.

Are suggestions welcomed and tried out?

Yes.

Can you give me some examples?

Couple of things that we have done in the past is vehicle specs. We have come to renew vehicles or certain vehicles have come towards the end of their life so we've had a meeting and discussed which would be the best option to replace this vehicle and that's been taken on board and been acted upon. There was one that we used on the cleansing side of things. All they were really was a transit van but instead of it being a tipper it had a box on the back. Instead of having two of those we got a 7½ ton refuse truck which done both jobs so that was brought in. We're actually bringing in now defensive driving for vans up to 7½ ton to make the drivers more aware, driver awareness, and fuel economy saving that type of thing. That's been brought in as well.

I like the way that I think we are trusted. That's what I like, it fills you with confidence, it boosts you, and it picks up your moral.

Would you say the way you are managed affects the quality of your work?

I think it does, you know we haven't got someone standing over us all day long. From what I can honestly say the managers trust people to do a day's work and just leave you to it.

How much of your work is prescribed and how much do you have influence over?

To be honest although it's pretty repetitive what the lads do, we're in contact with the lad's right through the shift so we have to be spontaneous and change things from time to time so really it's all the time that we are changing things.

Have you ever come across the term empowerment?

Once or twice before, yes.

What does it mean to you?

Empowerment to me personally I don't really give it a lot of thought to be honest with you. I'll be perfectly honest.

(short discussion on the various definitions of empowerment ensued)

From what you have said earlier do you feel empowered?

Within reason obviously, sometimes it's strange with being on the operational side of things sometimes I feel that again me, I could deal with a little bit more but obviously I'm a supervisor.

Do you feel that is the same throughout the Authority or unique to your team?

My contact with the rest of the authority to be perfectly honest is quite limited. I've just met them on courses and such like and I think that we are quite fortunate but that's just listening to what other people say, I have no contact with other peoples managers and such like but it seems that way to me.

Would you prefer to have your work spelled out for you or have some say in how it is carried out?

I prefer to have some say.

Why do you feel like that?

I'll be perfectly honest from time to time maybe you say the wrong things but I'm not one that can just sit back and take things I have to have my say whether it's right or wrong.

Would you say your line manager empowers you?

I suppose so yes.

What makes you say that?

Well we are just left to get on with things really. You know we manage the operational side I would think 100%.

Is this best for you and best for the performance of your team?

Yes, we seem to be getting closer to people, it's more one to one than in the past but I also do feel that there has got to be distance there as well. We can't be friends and bosses at the same time, there's got to be a line drawn but I feel we are not just here to put them down we are here to support them and encourage them too. It didn't happen a great deal in the past but it does now.

Who do you allocate work to?

We allocate work, me personally to the refuse on a day to day basis, it's to the kerbside collections on a day to day basis and also to the cleansing on a day

to day basis and that can be seven days a week, so really we are in charge of seventy people.

How are your instructions passed down to your team?

We do it through memo, face to face, telephone and general paperwork. They have folders through the day of what their work allocation is. The main one for the refuse will be the folders, they have folders with all their paperwork in, same for the kerbside collection, and they have folders with their paperwork in. For the cleansing they have folders but the manager tends to put them together so if we need to speak to them it's generally over the phone and we will give them instruction over the phone.

Do you feel you are responsible for deciding how the work should be carried out?

We do check it from time to time. We'll go out and make sure work is done correctly. We do have a training schedule and a training plan so we will from time to time go and make sure they are following the training that they have been given in the past.

What steps do you take to ensure that your team are involved in decision making?

We do team talks, we've only started them really, we've only had 2, but we have team talks, the office door is always open if anyone has any concerns they can come and see us at anytime, which everyone knows that.

From the workforce really, they felt that they weren't getting a lot of support so rather than have a room of twenty men shouting at the same time we decided to let them speak to one another and maybe volunteers of four or five to meet with supervisors and the manager and discuss things and it seems to have worked well.

What freedom do you feel you give your team in changing the way work is carried out?

You know we are open to their suggestions too, if we give them an order for want of a better word, but they think oh we can do it better this way, as long as it is safe and is to the procedure then its fine.

How do you feel this impacts on the quality of the service?

I think it improves it yes.

Would you say you empower your team?

I suppose so.

What makes you say that?

We are given the instruction down and at the end of the day we can say they can do it that way or they can't. You know if we give instruction and they can do it a better way and we give them the go ahead and I also feel it builds moral as well. If they have got the say. Obviously they don't run the show we do, but we try and be fair and we listen to people.

What do you see as the main purpose of management?

The smooth running of the operation, the safe running of the operation. We want people to come in do a day's work and go home safely. You know on management side of things if we aren't running things correctly we are not going to be here.

Is there anything you would change in the way you and your work is managed that you feel would improve performance?

Anything I would change? Is this from the manager down to me or me down to the lads? Both. From the manager down to me I honestly don't know. If it was going to change i.e. to me through more responsibility or if we had one head supervisor rather than three equal, obviously if you were running that department single handed then you would want more money for it. I would need to know more info from your line manager as such on budgeting and things like that. From us down to the lads, I honestly don't know. Change things - I suppose more manpower wouldn't be a miss. That would be handy because from time to time we are stretched through sickness and such like.

Is there anything you would change in the way you manage that you feel would improve performance?

We do have the freedom to a degree obviously. I would like to be able to take it to the bitter end, i.e. if anyone stepped out of line, obviously we monitor the vehicles and we monitor accidents and injuries, we give people training for that to diminish. If someone was seen to be carelessly not paying attention after having training and such like well I would like to be able to follow that through the disciplinary side of things.

A verbal warning – which I don't want to be seen to be giving verbal warnings out like toffees you see. Possibly having the backing to carry that through would be quite something else because to be fair, the lads, although we don't see the managers a great deal, they see them even less. So they tend to see the three supervisors as their line manager so it would be nice well that's not the right word but to be able to follow things through to the bitter end.

What are the barriers to change then if you feel that way?

We just don't have the authority to do it; it's our manager who carries out that side of things. That's our limit, that's us stretched to the bitter end as such but on the whole from an organisation I think we manage well, we cover a lot of areas and the work is complete. We try to change the culture on the lads, giving them more training, we can suggest coming back to the training but obviously we have to get the go ahead from the management because of the financial penalty at the end of it, it's got to be paid for so we have to run it past them 10 times out of 10 it's done, it would just be nice if we had a budget to work off, we would know what we could and couldn't do training wise. The budget stays at manager level.

Appendix D
Sample Authority Locations
Includes Pilot and Reserve

