

NEIGHBOURHOODS and HOUSING SERVICES REPORT TO COUNCIL

9 DECEMBER 2010.

I ended my last report to Council in October 2009 by welcoming our new Director, Sally Burns. In the last year, Sally has built on the strong foundations she inherited and formed a new directorate of Communities and Neighbourhoods encompassing Neighbourhood Services, Housing Services, Lifelong Leisure and Culture. The new directorate has started to bed down, and from 1st November a new management team is in place. One of her innovations is a quarterly newsletter for members which I hope has made it easier for you to keep track of all the functions of the Directorate.

Waste Management

Two major service development projects have been implemented this year. We are now midway through rolling out kerbside recycling and alternate weekly waste to approximately 16,600 additional households, mainly in flats and terraced areas. The project has proved challenging but we will complete the roll out by March 2011 when 98% of households will have a kerbside recycling service.

The second development is now complete with the provision of the 3 box recycling system to over 60,000 households providing residents with standardised containers and replacing the mishmash of boxes and bags. This roll out has been well received with very good feedback from residents. An initial 'before and after' evaluation exercise suggests that recycling has increased by about 2.7%.

Our household recycling rate is forecast to be 44.3% in 2010/11, and we expect to landfill less than 55% of our municipal waste. Crucially we expect to send 57000 tonnes of municipal waste to landfill this year, down from 60,300 in 2009/10 and an 11% decrease over 3 years. Each household will produce 590kg of residual waste this year – down from 663kg in 2007/08. This is very good news and comes from our waste minimisation work, increased opportunities for recycling, national trends in lighter packaging and the impact of the recession on buying habits.

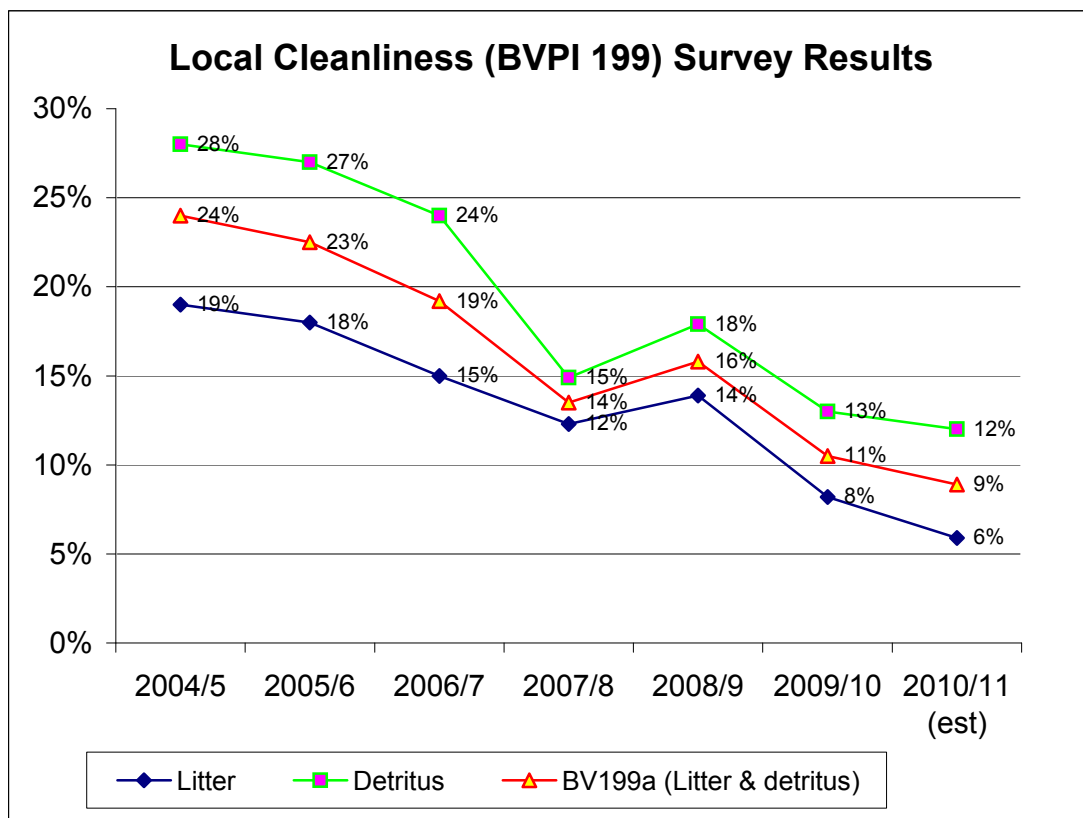
Work has also been going on to make our waste collection service more efficient. Route optimisation software is being used to pilot revised rounds, which should mean the crews can complete their work quicker, reducing mileage and fuel use. This software is also being used with other vehicles such as mechanical sweepers and litter bin emptying to improve efficiency.

Local Environment

Keeping the city clean is the front face of CANs.

Our ongoing NPI195 survey data suggests that 2009/10 was the cleanest York has been since we started to do regular surveys in 2004/5. In 2009/10, just 5.9% of areas surveyed had unacceptable levels of litter and dirt compared with 8.2% in 2007/08 and 9.9% in 2008/09. The graph below converts the NPI195 figures into BVPI199 figures to show the improving trend over time. The 2010/11 data in the graph is based on just one of the 3 surveys carried out each year.

Of course there will still be grot spots and we rely on members of the public to tell us where these are so that we can clean them. We are currently piloting a new and improved customer contact service, linking the call centre and back office staff closer together to support a range of environmental services including Neighbourhood Pride. The front office software system has been significantly upgraded and these developments should allow us to provide a better level of customer service, more efficiently and at less cost.



Overall York won silver gilt in York in Bloom this year with a coveted gold award in the summer judging and winning the city section of the competition. Those results would not have been possible without the efforts of staff in Neighbourhood Pride, Street Environment, and Parks and Open Spaces and also the Lord Mayor. I also want to recognise the very important part that volunteers, residents and businesses across the city now play in making the city's entry a success. For example this year we have seen people get involved through the allotment competition, the tenants Home Grown competition, and we have our first Edible York plots. There are too many to mention, but I want to thank all those who take part in making the city look so good.

The harder end of the work is around environmental enforcement. Over the last couple of years we have greatly increased the amount of enforcement we do. There is now a greater than ever chance of receiving an FPN for littering in the street (including cigarette litter) and we have really tackled fly-tipping head on through doing about 32% more enforcement activity. In 2009/10 there were 6 prosecutions for fly-tipping. While fly-tipping has risen again this

year to about 77 incidents per month, this is still less than the figure of 93 incidents per month we experienced in 2008/09.

Highways

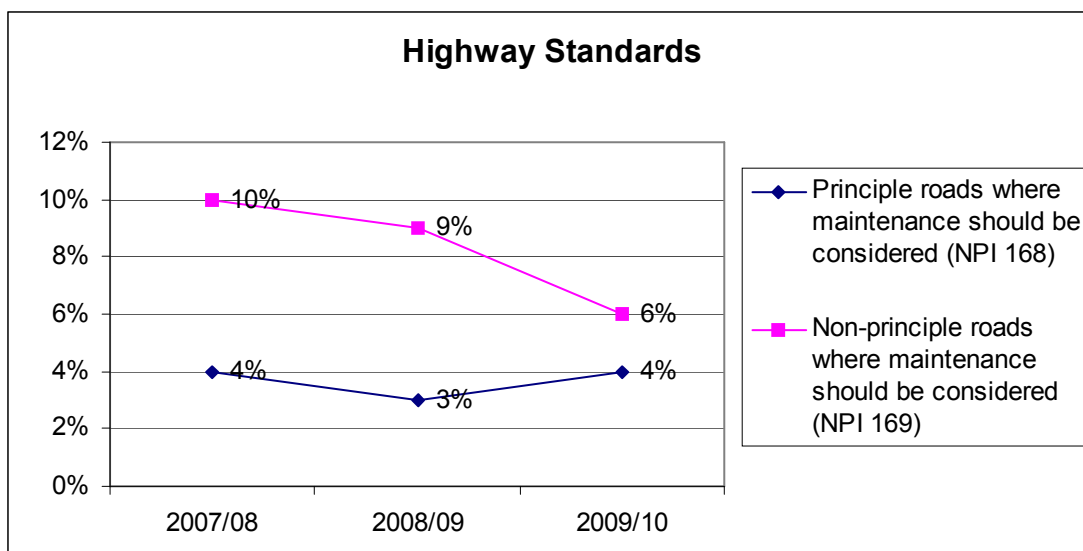
We removed most of the client contractor split from the highways function in early 2009, and have worked hard to integrate City Strategy staff into a single end to end highways maintenance function. The severe winter last year certainly tested that team, both in terms of being able to cope with the demands placed on the service during the severe weather and then in terms of recovering the position afterwards.

York coped relatively well during the snow, undertaking record numbers of gritting and snow clearance runs, spreading record amounts of salt, sand and grit. Some weaknesses in the system did show up and both the Executive and the scrutiny committee reviewed the service and recommended that some changes should be made.

- Some new gritting routes have been added
- a severe weather policy is in place,
- a special vehicle purchased to treat main cycle tracks
- the introduction of temporary salt bags.

I was disappointed that so few members were able to attend the service's open day held at the depot in October, as that provided a valuable insight into the challenges facing the winter gritting teams. As I write this report we are already testing the revised winter maintenance policy with the first major snow of the year.

In terms of roads – the two national survey based measures NPI168 and NPI169 suggest that 4% of our principal roads were in need of repair in 2009/10 (up from 3% the previous year – and 2nd quartile compared with other unitaries), and 6% of our non-principal roads were in need of repair in 2009/10 (down from 9% in 2008/09 – also 2nd quartile). These technical measures show that we recovered from the winter well and that our roads are in comparatively good condition



Parking Services

The service has focused on improving customer service levels and during 2009/10 we increased the number of patrols around schools from 1.9 to 3.5 per week, and increased the number of resident parking area patrols per week per street from 5 to 6.8. The parking service now regularly asks for and receives customer feedback from its Respark customers. In response to customer feedback at an equality impact assessment consultation event last year, we now offer unlimited parking permits to residents with caring responsibilities. The service is currently being reviewed under the More for York programme to see how it could improve further while reducing back office costs.

Public Toilets

Silver Street toilets opened in May 2010, allowing for the closure of the Parliament Street toilets which had been problematical for many years. The service piloted a community toilet service in Acomb but this was not successful. We have recently put some additional project resource in place to see whether a community toilet scheme could be made to work in the city centre. The service will continue to seek alternative ways to provide improved public toilet facilities, making best use of the assets we have.

Regulatory Services

Our regulatory services (and Licensing and Bereavement Services as well) were awarded the Customer Service Excellence standard in 2009, and maintained that award in 2010. Our Environmental Health and Trading Standards department is one of the most go ahead in the country. In the last year we have:

- continued to run a programme of 'test purchases' using under age volunteers to see if retailers are selling items such as alcohol and cigarettes. The service's view is that retailers are now taking the issue of under age sales much more seriously.

- started to undertake a number of larger and more complicated regional fraud investigations via the regionally funded 'Scambuster' team.
- continued to offer an out of hours noise nuisance service that many councillors will know is successful in tackling an issue of great concern to many residents.
- maintained the development of "Cold Calling Controlled Zones" to tackle the problems of doorstep crime for vulnerable people. 137 zones were in place at the end of October 2010, with a number more being processed. An evaluation in 2009 suggested that 61% of residents in the zones felt less concerned about doorstep crime, and just 2% felt more concerned. 82% felt that they could deal with cold callers, and only 8% did not feel able to.
- had continued success with our 'scores on the doors scheme' that gives food premises a star rating based in their standards of food hygiene. So far this year the scores on the door web site has dealt with over 80,000 searches of York premises.
- found more instances of under strength drinks, such as vodka and whisky, being sold from bars and restaurants in York. Our work in this area has resulted in us being awarded a silver award by the drinks industry for our enforcement work.
- been awarded regional champions status for low emissions, i.e. reducing traffic and climate change emissions.
- had EPU's JorAir website recently ranked as one of the top three local authority air quality websites.

Neighbourhood Management

The service is leading on a pilot area working scheme covering 6 wards in the west of York. This pilot will run until September 2011. The aim is to streamline and strengthen ward level planning and delivery arrangements to support ward members to take decisions about priorities in their ward. One aim is to ensure the full and committed support of a wider range of partner agencies, including local voluntary sector agencies and groups. This may mean focusing on particular areas of wards, and it may mean shifting resource and priority within ward boundaries. It is still early days, but the pilot has the potential of reducing cost and improving flexibility and delivery of services to tackle local issues together. This is a challenging but exciting and innovative piece of work.

Registrars Services

In Autumn 2010, the Registrars Service opened a bereavement suite at York District Hospital. This initiative means we will be able to offer a sensitive and convenient service to families on site. The service continues to receive satisfaction ratings in excess of 95% satisfaction. The service is now working towards achieving Customer Service Excellence status.

I took on responsibility for the Housing Landlord function in May 2010.

Housing Services

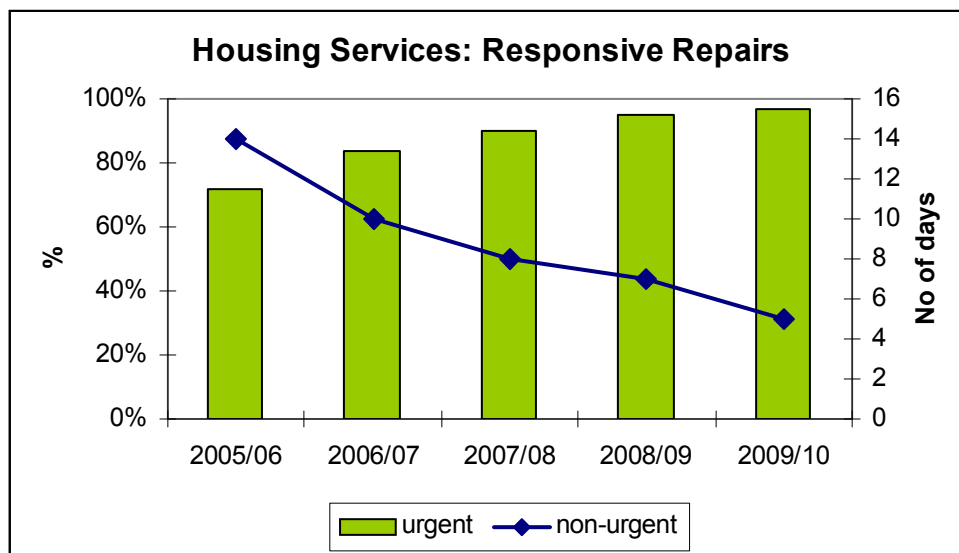
The service has set out its vision for the future, "Creating homes, building communities", which is supported by 5 key outcomes. A comprehensive and

challenging service plan sets out priorities and timescales to support each of these outcomes which have been shaped by tenant priorities as identified through the annual satisfaction survey and how we compare using Housemark benchmarking data against housing organisations across England.

The service plan outlines our commitment to continuous service improvement and a desire for the service to be an excellent “3 star” service by 2013. I look forward to seeing the results of this programme in maintaining our current top benchmarking performance and achieving top performance in other areas in due course

Recent national announcements about rent and housing benefits will bring some challenges. Tenants tell us that the quality of the repairs service is their highest priority. The Building repairs team have undertaken a large scale efficiency project with More for York since removing the client contractor split in April 2010. This work will improve the value for money which we offer our tenants. The repairs workforce now use mobile devices to aid communication, and we source our material through the innovative arrangement with Jewsons. This drive for efficiencies resulted in just over £700k of savings in 2009/10.

In 2009/10 97% of urgent repairs were completed in time compared to 95% in 2008/09, and 72% in 2005/6. The average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs dropped to 5 days compared with 6.6 days in 2008/9, and 8.0 days in 2007/8.



The most recent Annual Housing Monitor (AHM) carried out in November 2009 suggests that tenants are more satisfied with the service we provide than in other local authority areas. Comparing results using HouseMark benchmarking data for 08/09 reveals that 4 out of 6 AHM indicators are in top quartile position. These are.

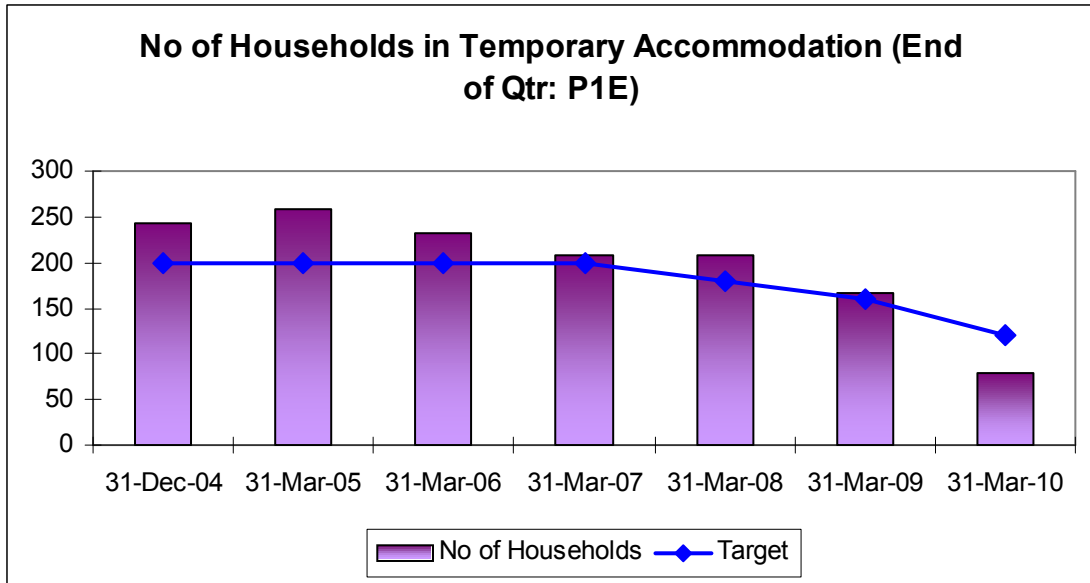
- Tenant satisfaction with the overall service provided by the landlord has increased from 85% to 89%. Top quartile performance is 84%.
- Tenant satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service has improved from 83% to 87%. Top quartile performance is 82%.
- Tenant satisfaction with Value for Money for rent has increased from 81% to 85%. Top quartile position is 82%.
- Tenant satisfaction with the general condition of their property has improved from 82% to 85%. Top quartile position is 86%.
- Tenant satisfaction with views being taken into account has increase from 68% to 72%. Top quartile position is 67%.

Customer involvement is a key priority in shaping the housing service. The Customer Engagement Strategy “Your Service, Your Say” has been developed with customers and sets out a range of ways customers can be involved and influence service improvement in the future. In 2010/11 the Federation of Residents’ Association will be checking and scrutinising our performance. The first tenant open day was held in November 2010 for tenants to set standards and priorities for the housing service.

One area where satisfaction is low is how we handle anti social behaviour. 51% of respondents were satisfied in 2009 (top quartile is 84%). In response the service has consulted extensively with customers and partners and set up an anti-social behaviour customer panel, which has led to the development of a corporate anti-social behaviour strategy. The appointment of an Assistant Director for Housing and Public Protection (including responsibility for Community Safety liaison with the police) will strengthen the impact of this work.

There are a number of particular achievements that I want to highlight.

- Current tenant rent arrears are now at the lowest for 10 years.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation reduced significantly to 79, which far exceeded the Government target of 121.
- In conjunction with voluntary sector resettlement agencies we were awarded “Regional Champion” status for rough sleeping and hosted a series of training and show and tell events.



- In 2009/10 1076 cases of homelessness were prevented compared to 645 in 2008/09.
- The first new council houses in the city for almost 20 years will be built at Lilbourne Drive, Clifton. These homes will be built to some of the highest environmental standards in the country meaning very low energy bills for the tenants who will be living there

The portfolio is very varied, and full of unsung heroes, so my apologies to those sections that I haven't mentioned.

If I made an award to the team of the year I hope that you would agree that our gritter drivers would deserve it for their sterling work and commitment last winter. When we were tucked up in bed they were out on the highways and byways keeping the roads open. Let us hope that the recent cold weather is not a sign of things to come.